# DRAMA

**For**

**Primary Education Students**
**English Department**
**(Third Year)**

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## Contents

## Introduction

Drama can be simply defined as a composition of poetry or prose performed on the stage, where the story is told through dialogue and action, accompanied by gestures, costumes, and settings as in real life.

The origin of the drama is deeply rooted in the religious nature of mankind. The same applies not only to English dramas, but also to dramas from other countries. Ancient Greek and Roman dramas mainly dealt with the religious ceremonies of the people. It was a religious element that led to the development of the drama. Most of the Bible is written in Latin, so the general public could not understand its meaning. For this reason, the priests found some new teaching methods and tried to explain the teachings of the Bible to the general public. To this end, they have developed a new way in which the gospel story is explained through living pictures. The cast recreated the story in a stupid show.

**The elements of drama are:**

1. Plot
2. Characterization
3. Dialogue
4. Settings
5. Stage directions
6. Conflict
7. Theme

## A Brief History of English Drama:

A drama is a literary work performed by a professional actor on the stage (or theater) in front of an audience. It's about conflicts, actions, and specific topics. Impressive makeup, facial expressions and artist body language are the hallmarks of live performances. Although art forms exist in different countries, the drama deserves special mention in Britain because of its relationships with several legendary playwrights, including William Shakespeare. Read the following lines for interesting information about the history, background and origins of British theater.

### Background & Origin of English Drama:

### Emergence:

The Romans introduced the drama to England in the Middle Ages. As for the land, many auditoriums were built for this artistic performance. Mummers' play related to Morris dance became a popular street theater format during this period. The performance is based on the folk tales of St. George, Robin Hood and the Dragon. The artist went from town to town to play these folk tales. In return for their service, they received money and hospitality. The mysteries and moral plays at the medieval religious festival were Christian-themed.

### English Renaissance

The English Renaissance, an English cultural and artistic movement that lasted from the 16th to the early 17th century, paved the way for the dominance of British drama. Queen Elizabeth, I ruled at a time when great poetry and drama were born. Notable playwrights of the time included William

Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Johnson, and John Webster. Playwrights wrote plays on subjects such as history, comedy, and tragedy. While most playwrights specialize in only one subject, Shakespeare became an artist who created plays based on all three subjects.

**Interregnum (1649-1660)**

During the armistice, the Puritans closed British theaters for their religious and ideological reasons. However, in London the theaters reopened shortly after the “Reconstruction” in 1660. With the support of Prince Charles II, the theater continued to thrive. The writings of current playwrights and the appearance of professional actresses in dramas (previously all female characters were male) drew public attention. The Yushin in

Was an opportunity to incorporate new genres such as Yushin heroism and comedy into the drama? George Etheridge’s Fashionable Man (1676), William Wycherley’s Country Wife (1676), Aphra Behn’s the Tramp (1677), John Dryden’s All for Love (1677) and (AurengZebe) (1675), Thomas Otway’s Venice Preserved (1682) was one of the popular plays of the time. Sexual frankness was the highlight of the comedy during the recovery period. The aristocratic spirit of Prince Charles II and his court promoted such plays that began in 1660 and continued until 1685.

**18th Century**

The British Restoration comedy, which began in the late 17th century, declined with the advent of the 18th century. Family tragedy and sentimental comedy have become a new taste of this era. Burlesque and musical entertainment at the fair

booth, which preceded the British music hall, flourished during this period, reducing the popularity of legal British theater.

**Victorian Era (1837-1901)**

During the Victorian era, plays written by Shakespeare competed with musical burlesques and comic operas. Reed Entertainment, a German company, tried to start a musical theater in England in 1855. In 1890, the first series of musical comedies of the Edwardian era were released in this country. With the development of public transportation, the audience moved, and now it is possible to go to the theater until late at night. The number of prospects for English theaters has increased significantly. As a result, performances in theaters began to become longer.

As time passed, more and more people began to visit the theater. This made drama a lucrative business. The increase in the audience led to an increase in the production value of the drama. This art form has recorded consistent performance as it grows in popularity. Towards the end of the Victorian era, the fame of the leading poets and playwrights of the time, W. S. Gilbert and Oscar Wilde, rose. The plays Wilde wrote closely resemble those of Edwardian playwrights such as George Bernard Shaw (Ireland) and Henrik Ibsen (Norway).

**William Shakespeare:**

William Shakespeare is the father of English Drama. He wrote 18 comedies, 10 Tragedies and 10 Histories. Shakespeare's era began in the 16th century in community theaters. He wrote for modern theater and manipulated the Elizabethan stage with great resourcefulness and ingenuity. William Shakespeare was an English playwright, poet and actor, considered by many to be

the greatest writer in the English language and the greatest playwright in the world. He is often referred to as Britain's national poet and "The Bard of Avon". The following is a list of Shakespeare's most famous plays:

- Hamlet
- Macbeth
- King Lear
- Romeo and Juliet
- The Importance of Being Earnest
- Othello
- The Merchant of Venice
- Twelfth Night

**Shakespeare's plays**

William Shakespeare is best known for his plays, although he was also an accomplished poet and actor. But when we think about Shakespeare, plays like "Romeo and Juliet," "Hamlet," and "Much Ado About Nothing" immediately spring to mind.

*What Were Shakespeare's Plays About?*

Shakespeare was writing between 1590 and 1613. Many of his early plays were performed at the building that would eventually become the infamous Globe Theatre in 1598. It was here that Shakespeare made his name as a budding young writer and penned such classics as "Romeo and Juliet," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and "The Taming of the Shrew."

Many of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies were written in the early 1600s and would have been performed at the Globe Theatre.

***Genres***

Shakespeare wrote in three genres: tragedy, comedy, and history. Although this seems very straightforward, it is notoriously difficult to categorize the plays. This is because the histories blur comedy and tragedy; the comedies contain elements of tragedy, and so on.

- **Tragedy**

Some of Shakespeare's most famous plays are tragedies. The genre was extremely popular with Elizabethan theatergoers. It was conventional for these plays to follow the rise and fall of a powerful nobleman. All of Shakespeare's tragic protagonists have a fatal flaw that propels them towards their bloody end.

Popular tragedies include "Hamlet," "Romeo and Juliet," "King Lear," and "Macbeth."

- **Comedy**

Shakespeare's comedy was driven by language and complex plots involving mistaken identity. A good rule of thumb is if a character disguises themselves as a member of the opposite sex, you can categorize the play as a comedy.

Popular comedies include "Much Ado About Nothing," and "The Merchant of Venice."

- **History**

Shakespeare used his history plays to make social and political commentary. Therefore, they are not historically accurate in the same way we would expect a modern historical drama to be. Shakespeare drew from a range of historical sources and set

most of his history plays during the Hundred Years' War with France.

Popular histories include "Henry V" and "Richard III."

**Shakespeare's Language:**

Shakespeare used a mixture of verse and prose in his plays to denote the social standing of his characters.

As a rule of thumb, common characters spoke in prose, while noble characters further up the social food chain would revert to iambic pentameter. This particular form of poetic meter was extremely popular in Shakespeare's time.

Although iambic pentameter sounds complex, it is a simple rhythmic pattern. It has ten syllables in each line that alternate between unstressed and stressed beats. However, Shakespeare liked to experiment with iambic pentameter and played around with the rhythm to make his character's speeches more effective.

Why is Shakespeare's language so descriptive? We should remember that the plays were performed in daylight, in the open air, and with no set. In the absence of atmospheric theater lighting and realistic sets, Shakespeare had to conjure up mythical islands, the streets of Verona, and cold Scottish castles through language alone.

**The 'Golden Age' And William Shakespeare**

The name 'William Shakespeare' is associated with a golden age in English drama.

The term “golden age” refers to a period when great activity in the fields of the arts and science take place and in which great works are accomplished. The term was originally used by the early Greek and Roman poets to refer to a time when human beings enjoyed a better, purer, time, but it has been adapted for use in other areas, so you can have a golden age of tennis, or rock and roll, or comic books, or anything else. Among the giants of European cultural history the figure of Shakespeare looms large and we regard the time in which he wrote his plays as the golden age of English drama.

**The Golden Age Meets the Renaissance:**

Human beings always look back, searching history for something that appears in hindsight to be better than what they currently have. Although the 21st century is a time of incredible artistic and scientific endeavour and development, we look back at a previous era, notably, the Renaissance, and label it “the golden age” of arts and science.

The Renaissance was a time when Europeans were breaking out of the cultural constraints imposed by the medieval Church. Great thinkers across Europe were courageously directing their eyes away from the face of God and turning them towards the mind, the form and the ideas of human beings in a huge humanistic movement. Artists, poets, architects, composers and scientists were challenging the old assumptions. This led to a blossoming of new perceptions in every area of cultural endeavour. The practitioners of the arts and science looked back beyond the darkness of fourteen centuries and took

their inspiration from the pre-Christian, humanist qualities in Greco-Roman culture.

The Renaissance flowered right across Europe but had different emphases in the various European cultures – it was religion and philosophy in Germany, for example; art, architecture and sculpture in Italy. And in England, it was drama.

All through the Middle Ages English drama had been religious and didactic. When Elizabeth came to the throne most of the plays on offer to the public were Miracle Plays, presenting in crude dialogue stories from the Bible and lives of the saints, and Morality Plays, which taught lessons for the guidance of life through the means of allegorical action. They were primarily dramas about God and abstract things, not about people.

But now the theatre was becoming a place where people went to see, not dramatised lectures on good behaviour, but a reflection of their own spirit and day-to-day interests. They wanted to laugh and to cry – to be moved, not by divine reflection, but by human beings doing good and bad things just as they did – loving and murdering, stealing, cheating, acting sacrificially, getting into trouble and behaving nobly: in short, being human like themselves. They wanted a good story. And they wanted a good laugh.

And so, there was a chance for writers who liked telling stories, portraying fights and making audiences laugh. It was that humanizing of plays that led to the transformation of English

drama and the popularization of the theatre, and it thus became a golden age of theatre.

Those of us who love Shakespeare see him as the central figure in a “golden age” of English drama, of English theatre, and English literature. And certainly, in Renaissance England, particularly during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, it was a remarkable time for theatrical activity. And Shakespeare was active in that theatrical surge. He was central, as a theater owner and a writer, but there were several men just as prominent.

**Playwriting in the Golden Age:**

Shakespeare would not have regarded himself as the central figure of a great age of English drama. As far as he was concerned, although he knew, once he had learnt the tricks of the trade, that he was a good writer, he would never have seen himself as in any way central to a mighty European cultural surge. He would have regarded himself as an artisan hammering out plays as part of his day-to-day work rather than the artiste we see him as today. And he would not regard what was going on around him every day as some big historical tidal wave, as we see it today. To him it was a job opportunity, doing something he enjoyed and was good at, and a route to wealth, which he travelled with enthusiasm.

Playwrights were makers of plays – thus the word “wright” – in the sense that other artisans made wheels, for example, and

were known as “wheelwrights.” For those writers it was a daily grind of working in small, crowded, dark rooms, sweating out plays at speed with other writers and being pressurized by their bosses to hurry. The more plays you could put on in a week, the more chance there was of filling the theatre with return customers. And the more money the theatre owners would make.

It was that circumstance that led to the extraordinary number of good plays by well trained and experienced writers tuning into the things that would please audiences. If your plays didn’t connect with ordinary citizens no-one would come to your theatre, so the cultivation of good writers able to communicate with audiences resulted in the array of outstanding plays by writers who are still famous today. Shakespeare is now, in our time, seen as central to that. But to think that if Shakespeare had never existed that wouldn’t have been a golden age of English drama and theatre is wrong. The absence of Shakespeare would have made no difference. We would still be going to the theatre today to see plays by Marlow, Webster, Ben Jonson, and several others.

Shakespeare was working in the theatre at a time when attending plays was by far the most popular entertainment in London. At a time when people didn’t all go out to work on jobs in fixed places during regular working hours, as we do today, most people sought entertainment during the long summer days. The purpose-built theatre, a new invention during the reign of

Elizabeth, took London by storm as new plays were churned out and one could go to the same theatre three times in a week and see a different play each time.

Before those theatres emerged plays weren't an everyday thing. Groups of players would perform in the houses of wealthy patrons, or in the courtyards of inns, or they would tour around the market towns. But now, with a lot of money to be made from this new fad, entrepreneurs were building theatres and employing professional actors. There was a huge demand for plays so playwrights were engaged to write them at great speed. What made it such a fruitful period was the great number of excellent plays.

More and more entrepreneurs jumped on the bandwagon and by the time Elizabeth had been on the throne for twenty years there were about twenty theatres in London for a population of two hundred thousand. Writers were needed all the time, so they were recruited and trained to write plays that would appeal to a modern, sophisticated, audience.

The two Shakespeare brothers arrived in London in 1592 and both got jobs as actors. William, aged 28, was soon attracted to the writing aspect of theatre and made friends among the writers. He was invited to join a team that was working on a new history series. It was a large group – at least a dozen – mainly writers who haven't achieved lasting fame, but led by one who has – Thomas Nashe. And it was in that way that Shakespeare made a contribution to the writing of his first

play, Henry VI (part 2). He ended up writing 20 percent of the text so the others were clearly impressed with him.

As time went by and the demand for new plays increased Shakespeare worked in many teams of writers, and later, paired up with some of the top names like George Peele, Thomas Middleton, and the Jacobean master dramatist, John Webster. And, of course, he became the biggest name of all, himself recruiting new talent and training them in play writing. After his retirement to Stratford young playwrights visited him to take advantage of his skill and experience as they followed their own ambition to make money from playwriting.

And so, looking back at a time in London when some sharp businessmen saw an opportunity and milked it for all it was worth, what we see is the flowering of drama, and because the poetry of the play texts was so magnificent, a poetic era like England has never known. Close examinations of the period led to the discovery of other poets, like John Donne, who might have remained unknown if there hadn't been such a scholarly interest in the period, but who is now regarded as one of England's greatest poets. And so, putting all those things together, we now see, in the seventeenth century, a golden age, not only of drama and theatre, but of literature too.

And now, after such a rush of creativity, looking back, we can have no doubt that Shakespeare was not only the greatest English dramatist but also the greatest English poet, a central figure in both theatre and literature.

## Macbeth by William Shakespeare: a timeless exploration of violence and treachery

Macbeth issues a warning: the greatest risk to the inner life comes from the delusion that it does not exist.

“A little water clears us of this deed,” says Lady Macbeth, thinking that getting the look right will make it right. But in doing so she commits treachery upon her inner life.

In a world where existence seems increasingly to equate to self-projection, she is an example of the mistake we make when we see the visible surface of public and social media as the place where reality plays out, the place where we see what we are.

Macbeth, like most of Shakespeare’s plays, sets two worlds spinning: one of outer action and one of inner being. The collision of their orbits provides the spark for the drama. The themes of Macbeth’s outer world of action are violence and treachery. The intersecting themes of its inner world are ambition, and moral reasoning.

In exploring what holds a society together and what tears it apart, the play doesn’t just condemn violence, it dramatizes its uses. The play showcases both loyal violence and treacherous violence.

In Act One, Scene One, a soldier reports that Macbeth, a Scottish general, has shown prowess on the battlefield and “unseamed” his rebel opponent, Macdonald, “from the nave to th’ chops.” That means he cut him in half.

Macbeth does this in loyal service to King Duncan, and usually enters the stage splattered with blood, that of his victims and his own – blood lost in service to his king. The military campaign is to suppress domestic rebellion. Among the rebels is the “disloyal traitor” the Thane of Cawdor, whose title Duncan transfers to Macbeth, commanding that the treacherous clan chief be executed.

Macbeth’s first promotion, then, is gained through the sanctioned violence of killing traitors. There is a fragile moment at the beginning of the play, when this violence seems to have restored order.

Macbeth’s second promotion is also achieved through violence, but this time by premeditated treachery. The witches on the heath greet him as Thane of Glamis, which he is, Thane of Cawdor, which we know from Duncan’s command that he will be, and “king hereafter”.

This sets the spark to the powder keg of Macbeth’s ambition. Violence is in his repertoire and he needs only to take one violent step further to fulfil their prophecy.

The thought of killing the king, a thought “whose murder yet is but fantastical”, occurs to him immediately. And when he arrives back at his castle, his wife Lady Macbeth urges him to “catch the nearest way” to fulfilment of the prophecy by stabbing King Duncan to death as he sleeps in their home.

Here one of the inner-world themes intrudes – who is morally responsible for what Macbeth does? Do the witches wield power

over him? Does Lady Macbeth, as the architect of regicide, carry equal blame with Macbeth?

### *Outer and inner dimensions*

The unfolding of their murderous plot is dramatized by Shakespeare as having outer and inner dimensions. The physical world is portrayed as instantly ruptured by their act of violence. Even before Duncan's murder is discovered, Lennox speaks of the unruly night that has passed: chimneys were blown down, strange lamentings and screams of death were heard in the air, and the earth shook and was feverish.

There is dramatic irony in Macbeth's response to this poetic description of cosmic disorder: "It was a rough night."

Society is also fractured. Duncan's sons flee Scotland. A mood of paranoid crisis sets in as Macbeth is crowned.

Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Macbeth - Charles A Buchel (1872) Wikimedia commons

But the treachery resonates inwardly, too, and Shakespeare keeps the inner dimension perpetually before the audience. That image from Act One of a man split down the middle is a potent symbol for the destruction the Macbeths have wrought upon themselves.

The order of Macbeth's mind begins to break down the moment he murders his king. He roams out of the king's chamber with the bloody daggers still in his hands saying he has heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep."

Lady Macbeth seems to preserve her practical mindset for a time. She says “a little water clears us of this deed”. But this is another moment of dramatic irony. Her moral delusion is patent.

It seems that Macbeth, with his auditory and ocular hallucinations, has the clearer moral vision. Inevitably, her sleeping mind goes to war with her waking consciousness: “Out damn spot!” She cannot unsee the blood on her hands.

The Macbeths have failed to anticipate that their inner lives – their minds and their functional connection with the world – will be broken by their outer action. Remarkably, these mental, physical, spiritual breakdowns are rendered from the sufferers’ point of view.

Before he kills the king, Macbeth gives a speech about ambition that shows he has the moral insight to avoid the crime. He says he has “no spur to prick the sides of [his] intent”, using the metaphor of riding a horse to express that there is nothing about Duncan to urge him forward into the act of murder.

Macbeth realises he has “only vaulting ambition”, which leaps over itself and falls on the other side. He anticipates the catastrophe, but he kills the king anyway.

### *The twists and turns of moral reasoning*

Why does Shakespeare include such contradictions?

Shakespeare understood that it is spellbinding to witness a character forming an inner resolution, or breaking one. In Macbeth, the stakes are high: an innocent life and a kingdom’s

peace hang in the balance. The tension is relentless. Lady Macbeth enters, cutting off Macbeth's reflection on ambition. He has just reasoned himself out of committing the murder, and she reasons him back into it.

The play dramatizes the twists and turns of moral reasoning and the pressure of emotional coercion on conscience. Macbeth is wise and compassionate one instant, and preparing to kill his friend the next. This challenges our tendency to see the world in black and white, populated by good people and bad people.

All of the themes of Macbeth – violence, treachery, moral reasoning, conscience and ambition – were close the surface of public consciousness in Shakespeare's day.

Since Henry VIII left the Catholic Church, establishing himself as the head of the Church of England in 1534, the nation's political landscape had been riven by religious opposition. This affected people's everyday lives and challenged their deepest inner convictions. In 1557, you could be burned as a heretic for being Protestant; in 1567, you could be burned as a heretic for being Catholic.

Being able to see the soul in motion, as Shakespeare allows his audience to do, was a fantasy that interrogators of both Catholic and Protestant persuasions would have cherished.

By the time Shakespeare wrote Macbeth, he was a member of The King's Men – a playing company patronized directly by a new king – James the First of England and the Sixth (you guessed it) of Scotland. What can we make of the fact of

Shakespeare writing a Scottish play for a Scottish king, who is also the boss of his particular business enterprise? He had to be very careful.

King James the First - John de Critz (1604). Public domain
Shakespeare steered a clever course. His play seems mildly topical and politically correct on the surface, but underneath it complicated the moral questions of its moment.

The first thing to be aware of is that James had a preoccupation with the occult. In 1597, James had published a book called Demonology, seeking to prove and condemn witchcraft. He had it published again in 1603 when he became King of England.

Shakespeare seems to pander to this obsession when he includes witches in his play, who discuss spells and make prophetic predictions.

Notice, though, that Shakespeare leaves unanswered the question of their moral culpability. We are left wondering whether it pleased or disturbed King James that the supernatural element in the play explains very little about the actions of its characters. Shakespeare portrays the Macbeths' ambition for power as perfectly adequate motivation for their criminal action.

The second thing to be aware of is The Gunpowder Plot. When Macbeth was first staged in 1606, England was reeling from the discovery of a nearly successful conspiracy to blow up parliament. If successful, the attempt would have killed the king and a large number of the nation's ruling class, and triggered catastrophic civic disorder.

## *The Gunpowder Plot: Torture and Persecution in Fact and Fiction*

### *Gunpowder, treason and plot:*

On 4 November 1605, Guy Fawkes was arrested. A letter tipping off a member of parliament had led to the discovery of a stash of barrels of gunpowder in a cellar under parliament. Under torture, Fawkes revealed the names of his Catholic conspirators.

The discovery of the plot was promoted as a defining moment of victory for the Protestant nation against its Catholic traitors within, and led to intensified persecution of Catholics across Europe.

The Gunpowder's Plot conspirators. Wikimedia commons
The adage, don't waste a crisis, seems to have been heeded by James. Even in its own moment, the event became a black and white moral fable, in which treachery was weeded out and punished with violence. The traitors were tortured and publicly executed. Their bodies were literally quartered.

How did Shakespeare's play, first performed in 1606, engage with the Gunpowder Plot and the grisly punishment of its perpetrators?

On the surface, Shakespeare cashed in on the way the Gunpowder Plot had shocked the people of London. Fireworks, or "squibs", were used at the opening of the play as special effects for the "thunder and lightning" called for in the script. It is

easy to imagine the first audience jumping with terror and then telling friends to attend the next spectacular performance.

By inventing the witches, Shakespeare also sets up ambiguous, almost imaginary figures of evil who “melt into air”. Were these anything like the monsters that the trial of the Gunpowder Plot conspirators had created in the public imagination? Many understood the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot to be an act of supernatural preservation of their God-ordained ruler. A silver commemorative medal from 1605 bears the Latin inscription: “You [God], the keeper of James, have not slept.”

**Image: British Museum**

Tracing a parallel with this sensibility, Shakespeare borrows Banquo – a real 11th century person believed to be an ancestor of King James – from the historical Chronicles of Raphael Holinshed. His characterization, deviating from that of Holinshed, puts King James, through association, on the side of right in the play.

Shakespeare’s story of Banquo, who is murdered on Macbeth’s orders but returns as a ghost, seems to shore up by supernatural intervention James’ right to the throne. That is, until we consider that the witches who prophesy that Banquo will be the father of kings are the same ones who predict Macbeth’s ascent to the crown.

Shakespeare’s play is unsettling. It provides a thought experiment. It teases out the moral ambiguities of a society

whose members see others in black and white, while permitting shades of grey in themselves.

It is a society in which treachery is punished with sanctioned violence, but in which ambition paves the way to real power via both violence and treachery. It is the kingdom of Scotland riven by contending clans. It is England of 1606 reeling from the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot. It is our world of perpetual crisis.

Crisis appeals to the human imagination because it offers to suspend the rules by which we normally operate. Crisis can, as Macbeth shows, make moral compromises appeal as “the nearest way” to increased power. It can make brutal measures seem necessary to retain it.

## Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*

Macbeth issues a warning for our times about the harm done to individuals and societies when they allow the will for power to drown out the inner voice of conscience.

On a dark winter night, a ghost walks the ramparts of Elsinore Castle in Denmark. Discovered first by a pair of watchmen, then by the scholar Horatio, the ghost resembles the recently deceased King Hamlet, whose brother Claudius has inherited the throne and married the king’s widow, Queen Gertrude. When Horatio and the watchmen bring Prince Hmlet, the son of Gertrude and the dead king, to see the ghost, it speaks to him, declaring ominously that it is indeed his father’s spirit, and that he was murdered by none other than Claudius. Ordering Hamlet to seek revenge on the man who

usurped his throne and married his wife, the ghost disappears with the dawn.

Prince Hamlet devotes himself to avenging his father's death, but, because he is contemplative and thoughtful by nature, he delays, entering into a deep melancholy and even apparent madness. Claudius and Gertrude worry about the prince's erratic behavior and attempt to discover its cause. They employ a pair of Hamlet's friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to watch him. When Polonius, the pompous Lord Chamberlain, suggests that Hamlet may be mad with love for his daughter, Ophelia, Claudius agrees to spy on Hamlet in conversation with the girl. But though Hamlet certainly seems mad, he does not seem to love Ophelia: he orders her to enter a nunnery and declares that he wishes to ban marriages.

A group of traveling actors comes to Elsinore, and Hamlet seizes upon an idea to test his uncle's guilt. He will have the players perform a scene closely resembling the sequence by which Hamlet imagines his uncle to have murdered his father, so that if Claudius is guilty, he will surely react. When the moment of the murder arrives in the theater, Claudius leaps up and leaves the room. Hamlet and Horatio agree that this proves his guilt. Hamlet goes to kill Claudius but finds him praying. Since he believes that killing Claudius while in prayer would send Claudius's soul to heaven, Hamlet considers that it would be an inadequate revenge and decides to wait. Claudius, now frightened of Hamlet's madness and fearing for his own safety, orders that Hamlet be sent to England at once.

Hamlet goes to confront his mother, in whose bedchamber Polonius has hidden behind a tapestry. Hearing a noise from behind the tapestry, Hamlet believes the king is hiding there. He draws his sword and stabs through the fabric, killing Polonius. For this crime, he is immediately dispatched to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. However, Claudius's plan for Hamlet includes more than banishment, as he has given Rosencrantz and Guildenstern sealed orders for the King of England demanding that Hamlet be put to death.

In the aftermath of her father's death, Ophelia goes mad with grief and drowns in the river. Polonius's son, Laertes, who has been staying in France, returns to Denmark in a rage. Claudius convinces him that Hamlet is to blame for his father's and sister's deaths. When Horatio and the king receive letters from Hamlet indicating that the prince has returned to Denmark after pirates attacked his ship en route to England, Claudius concocts a plan to use Laertes' desire for revenge to secure Hamlet's death. Laertes will fence with Hamlet in innocent sport, but Claudius will poison Laertes' blade so that if he draws blood, Hamlet will die. As a backup plan, the king decides to poison a goblet, which he will give Hamlet to drink should Hamlet score the first or second hits of the match. Hamlet returns to the vicinity of Elsinore just as Ophelia's funeral is taking place. Stricken with grief, he attacks Laertes and declares that he had in fact always loved Ophelia. Back at the castle, he tells Horatio that he believes one must be prepared to die, since death can come at any moment. A foolish courtier named Osric arrives on Claudius's orders to arrange the fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes.

The sword-fighting begins. Hamlet scores the first hit, but declines to drink from the king's proffered goblet. Instead, Gertrude takes a drink from it and is swiftly killed by the poison. Laertes succeeds in wounding Hamlet, though Hamlet does not die of the poison immediately. First, Laertes is cut by his own sword's blade, and, after revealing to Hamlet that Claudius is responsible for the queen's death, he dies from the blade's poison. Hamlet then stabs Claudius through with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink down the rest of the poisoned wine. Claudius dies, and Hamlet dies immediately after achieving his revenge.

At this moment, a Norwegian prince named Fortinbras, who has led an army to Denmark and attacked Poland earlier in the play, enters with ambassadors from England, who report that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Fortinbras is stunned by the gruesome sight of the entire royal family lying sprawled on the floor dead. He moves to take power of the kingdom. Horatio, fulfilling Hamlet's last request, tells him Hamlet's tragic story. Fortinbras orders that Hamlet be carried away in a manner befitting a fallen soldier.

In telling the story of a fatally indecisive character's inability to choose the proper course to avenge his father's death, *Hamlet* explores questions of fate versus free will, whether it is better to act decisively or let nature take its course, and ultimately if anything we do in our time on earth makes any difference. Once he learns his uncle has killed his father, Hamlet feels duty-bound to take decisive action, but he has so many doubts about his situation and even about his own feelings that

he cannot decide what action to take. The conflict that drives the plot of *Hamlet* is almost entirely internal: Hamlet wrestles with his own doubt and uncertainty in search of something he believes strongly enough to act on. The play's events are side-effects of this internal struggle. Hamlet's attempts to gather more evidence of Claudius's guilt alert Claudius to Hamlet's suspicions, and as Hamlet's internal struggle deepens, he begins to act impulsively out of frustration, eventually murdering Polonius by mistake. The conflict of *Hamlet* is never resolved: Hamlet cannot finally decide what to believe or what action to take. This lack of resolution makes the ending of Hamlet especially horrifying: nearly all the characters are dead, but nothing has been solved.

The play's exposition shows us that Hamlet is in the midst of three crises: his nation is under attack, his family is falling apart, and he feels deeply unhappy. The Ghost of the old king of Denmark appears on the castle battlements, and the soldiers who see it believe it must be a bad omen for the kingdom. They discuss the preparations being made against the threat from the Norwegian prince, Fortinbras. The next scene deepens our sense that Denmark is in political crisis, as Claudius prepares a diplomatic strategy to divert the threat from Fortinbras. We also learn that as far as Hamlet is concerned, his family is in crisis: his father is dead and his mother has married someone Hamlet disapproves of. Hamlet is also experiencing an internal crisis. Gertrude and Claudius are worried about his mood, and in his first soliloquy we discover that he feels suicidal: "O that this too, too sullied flesh would melt" (I.ii.).

The three crises of the play's opening—in the kingdom, in Hamlet's family, and in Hamlet's mind—lay the groundwork for the play's inciting incident: the Ghost's demand that Hamlet avenge his father's death. Hamlet accepts at once that it is his duty to take revenge, and the audience can also see that Hamlet's revenge would go some way to resolving the play's three crises. By killing Claudius, Hamlet could in one stroke remove a weak and immoral king, extract his mother from what he sees as a bad marriage, and make himself king of Denmark. Throughout the inciting incident, however, there are hints that Hamlet's revenge will be derailed by an internal struggle. The Ghost warns him: "Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive/Against thy mother aught" (I.v.). When Horatio and Marcellus catch up to Hamlet after the Ghost's departure, Hamlet is already talking in such a deranged way that Horatio describes it as "wild and whirling" (I.v.), and Hamlet tells them that he may fake an "antic disposition" (I.v.). The audience understands that the coming conflict will not be between Hamlet and Claudius but between Hamlet and his own mind.

For the whole of the second act—the play's rising action—Hamlet delays his revenge by pretending to be mad. We learn from Ophelia that Hamlet is behaving as if he is mad with love for her. We see him make fun of Polonius by talking nonsense which contains half-hidden jokes at Polonius's expense. Hamlet tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he has "lost all [his] mirth" (II.ii.). Only at the end of Act 2 do we learn the reason for Hamlet's delaying tactics: he cannot work out his true feelings about his duty to take revenge. First, he tells us, he doesn't feel as angry and vengeful as he thinks he should: "I[…]Peak like

John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause" (II.ii.). Second, he's worried that the Ghost wasn't really a ghost but a devil trying to trick him. He decides he needs more evidence of Claudius's crime: "I'll have grounds/More relative than this" (II.ii.).

As the rising action builds toward a climax, Hamlet's internal struggle deepens until he starts to show signs of really going mad. At the same time Claudius becomes suspicious of Hamlet, which creates an external pressure on Hamlet to act. Hamlet begins Act Three debating whether or not to kill himself: "To be or not to be—that is the question" (III.i.), and moments later he hurls misogynistic abuse at Ophelia. He is particularly upset about women's role in marriage and childbirth—"Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" (III.i.)—which reminds the audience of Hamlet's earlier disgust with his own mother and her second marriage. The troubling development of Hamlet's misogynistic feelings makes us wonder how much Hamlet's desire to kill Claudius is fuelled by the need to avenge his father's death, and how much his desire fuelled by Hamlet's resentment of Claudius for taking his mother away from him. Claudius, who is eavesdropping on Hamlet's tirade, becomes suspicious that Hamlet's madness presents "some danger" (III.i.) and decides to have Hamlet sent away: Hamlet is running out of time to take his revenge.

The play's climax arrives when Hamlet stages a play to "catch the conscience of the king" (II.ii.) and get conclusive evidence of Claudius's guilt. By now, however, Hamlet seems to have truly gone mad. His own behavior at the play is so provocative that when Claudius does respond badly to the play

it's unclear whether he feels guilty about his crime or angry with Hamlet. As Claudius tries to pray, Hamlet has yet another chance to take his revenge, and we learn that Hamlet's apparent madness has not ended his internal struggle over what to do: he decides not to kill Claudius for now, this time because of the risk that Claudius will go to heaven if he dies while praying. Hamlet accuses Gertrude of being involved in his father's death, but he's acting so erratically that Gertrude thinks her son is simply "mad […] as the sea and wind/When they each contend which is the mightier" (III.iv). Again, the audience cannot know whether Gertrude says these lines as a cover for her own guilt, or because she genuinely has no idea what Hamlet is talking about, and thinks her son is losing his mind. Acting impulsively or madly, Hamlet mistakes Polonius for Claudius and kills him.

The play's falling action deals with the consequences of Polonius's death. Hamlet is sent away, Ophelia goes mad and Laertes returns from France to avenge his father's death. When Hamlet comes back to Elsinore, he no longer seems to be concerned with revenge, which he hardly mentions after this point in the play. His internal struggle is not over, however. Now Hamlet contemplates death, but he is unable to come to any conclusion about the meaning or purpose of death, or to resign himself to his own death. He is, however, less squeamish about killing innocent people, and reports to Horatio how he signed the death warrants of Rosencranz and Guildenstern to save his own life. Claudius and Laertes plot to kill Hamlet, but the plot goes awry. Gertrude is poisoned by mistake, Laertes and Hamlet are both poisoned, and as he dies Hamlet finally murders Claudius. Taking his revenge does not end Hamlet's internal struggle. He

still has lots to say: “If I had time […] O I could tell you— / But let it be” (V.ii.) and he asks Horatio to tell his story when he is dead. In the final moments of the play the new king, Fortinbras, agrees with this request: “Let us haste to hear it” (V.ii.). Hamlet’s life is over, but the struggle to decide the truth about Hamlet and his life is not.

The next day at Elsinore Castle, Hamlet tells Horatio how he plotted to overcome Claudius’s scheme to have him murdered in England. He replaced the sealed letter carried by the unsuspecting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which called for Hamlet’s execution, with one calling for the execution of the bearers of the letter—Rosencrantz and Guildenstern themselves. He tells Horatio that he has no sympathy for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who betrayed him and catered to Claudius, but that he feels sorry for having behaved with such hostility toward Laertes. In Laertes’ desire to avenge his father’s death, he says, he sees the mirror image of his own desire, and he promises to seek Laertes’ good favor.

Their conversation is interrupted by Osric, a foolish courtier. Osric tries to flatter Hamlet by agreeing with everything Hamlet says, even when he contradicts himself; in the space of seconds, he agrees first that it is cold, then that it is hot. He has come to tell them that Claudius wants Hamlet to fence with Laertes and that the king has made a wager with Laertes that Hamlet will win. Then Osric begins to praise Laertes effusively, though Hamlet and Horatio are unable to determine what point he is trying to make with his overly elaborate proclamations. Finally, a lord enters and asks Hamlet if he is ready to come to

the match, as the king and queen are expecting him. Against Horatio's advice, Hamlet agrees to fight, saying that "all's ill here about my heart," but that one must be ready for death, since it will come no matter what one does (V.ii.222). The court marches into the hall, and Hamlet asks Laertes for forgiveness, claiming that it was his madness, and not his own will, that murdered Polonius. Laertes says that he will not forgive Hamlet until an elder, an expert in the fine points of honor, has advised him in the matter. But, in the meantime, he says, he will accept Hamlet's offer of love.

They select their foils (blunted swords used in fencing), and the king says that if Hamlet wins the first or second hit, he will drink to Hamlet's health, then throw into the cup a valuable gem (actually the poison) and give the wine to Hamlet. The duel begins. Hamlet strikes Laertes but declines to drink from the cup, saying that he will play another hit first. He hits Laertes again, and Bertrude rises to drink from the cup. The king tells her not to drink, but she does so anyway. In an aside, Claudius murmurs, "It is the poison'd cup: it is too late" (V.ii.235). Laertes remarks under his breath that to wound Hamlet with the poisoned sword is almost against his conscience. But they fight again, and Laertes scores a hit against Hamlet, drawing blood. Scuffling, they manage to exchange swords, and Hamlet wounds Laertes with Laertes' own blade.

The queen falls. Laertes, poisoned by his own sword, declares, "I am justly kill'd with my own treachery" (V.ii.318). The queen moans that the cup must have been poisoned, calls out to Hamlet, and dies. Laertes tells Hamlet that he, too, has been

slain, by his own poisoned sword, and that the king is to blame both for the poison on the sword and for the poison in the cup. Hamlet, in a fury, runs Claudius through with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink down the rest of the poisoned wine. Claudius dies crying out for help. Hamlet tells Horatio that he is dying and exchanges a last forgiveness with Laertes, who dies after absolving Hamlet.

The sound of marching echoes through the hall, and a shot rings out nearby. Osric declares that Fortinbras has come in conquest from Poland and now fires a volley to the English ambassadors. Hamlet tells Horatio again that he is dying, and urges his friend not to commit suicide in light of all the tragedies, but instead to stay alive and tell his story. He says that he wishes Fortinbras to be made King of Denmark; then he dies.

Fortinbras marches into the room accompanied by the English ambassadors, who announce that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Horatio says that he will tell everyone assembled the story that led to the gruesome scene now on display. Fortinbras orders for Hamlet to be carried away like a soldier.

In the final scene, the violence, so long delayed, erupts with dizzying speed. Characters drop one after the other, poisoned, stabbed, and, in the case of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, executed, as the theme of revenge and justice reaches its conclusion in the moment when Hamlet finally kills Claudius. In the moments before the duel, Hamlet seems peaceful, though also quite sad. He says that he feels ill in his

heart, but he seems reconciled to the idea of death and no longer troubled by fear of the supernatural. Exactly what has caused the change in Hamlet is unclear, but his desire to attain Laertes' forgiveness clearly represents an important shift in his mental state. Whereas Hamlet previously was obsessed almost wholly with himself and his family, he is now able to think sympathetically about others. He does not go quite so far as to take responsibility for Polonius's death, but he does seem to be acting with a broader perspective after the shock of Ophelia's death. Hamlet's death at the hands of Laertes makes his earlier declaration over Polonius's corpse, that God has chosen "to punish me with this and this with me," prophetic (III.iv.174). His murder of Polonius does punish him in the end, since it is Laertes' vengeful rage over that murder that leads to Hamlet's death.

**The Genre of Revenge Tragedy in British Literature:**

That death is neither heroic nor shameful, according to the moral logic of the play. Hamlet achieves his father's vengeance, but only after being spurred to it by the most extreme circumstances one might consider possible: watching his mother die and knowing that he, too, will die in moments.

The arrival of Fortinbras effectively poses the question of political legitimacy once again. In marked contrast to the corrupted and weakened royal family lying dead on the floor, Fortinbras clearly represents a strong-willed, capable leader, though the play does not address the question of whether his rule will restore the moral authority of the state.

## Twentieth Century British theatre:

It is commonly believed to have started in Dublin, Ireland with the foundation of the Irish Literary Theater by William B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and J. M. Synge . (Greenblatt 1843) Their purpose was to provide a specifically Celtic and Irish venue that produced works that “stage[d] the deeper emotions of Ireland.” (The Abbey’s) The playwrights of the Irish Literary Theater (which later became the Abbey Theater, as it is known today) were part of the literary revival and included: Sean O’Casey, J. M. Synge, W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn, to name a few. In England the well-made play genre was being rejected and replaced with actors and directors who were committed to bringing both reform and a serious audience to the theatre by appealing to the younger, socially conscious and politically alert crowd. In the plays by George Bernard Shaw, Harley Granville Barker, W. Somerset, and John Galsworthy, characters emulated this new crowd, satirized the well-made play characters, and created new stereotypes and new standards. (Chothia)

The early twentieth century denoted the split between ‘frocks and frills’ drama and serious works, following in the footsteps of many other European countries. “In Britain the impact of these continental innovations was delayed by a conservative theatre establishment until the late 1950s and 1960s when they converged with the counter-cultural revolution to transform the nature of English language theatre.” The West End, England’s Broadway, tended to produce the (Greenblatt 1844) musical comedies and well-made plays, while smaller

theatres and Irish venues took a new direction. The new direction was political, satirical, and rebellious. Common themes in the new early 20th century drama were political, reflecting the unease or rebellion of the workers against the state, philosophical, delving into the who and why of human life and existence, and revolutionary, exploring the themes of colonization and loss of territory. They explored common societal business practices (conditions of factories), new political ideologies (socialism), or the rise of a repressed sector of the population (women).(Chothia) Industrialization also had an impact on Twentieth century drama, resulting in plays lamenting the alienation of humans in an increasingly mechanical world.

Not only did Industrialization result in alienation; so did the wars. Between the wars, two types of theatre reined. In the West End, the middle class attended popular, conservative theatre dominated by Noel Coward and G. B. Shaw. “Commercial theatre thrived and at Drury Lane large budget musicals by Ivor Novello and Noel Coward used huge sets, extravagant costumes and large casts to create spectacular productions.” (West End) After the wars, taboos were broken and new writers, directors, and actors emerged with different views. Many played with the idea of reality, some were radically political, others shunned naturalism and questioned the legitimacy of previously unassailable beliefs. (Chothia) Towards the end of the century, the term ‘theatre of exorcism’ came into use due to the amount of plays conjuring the past in order to confront and accept it. Playwrights towards the end of the century count among their numbers: Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Brian Friel, Caryl Churchill, and Tom Stoppard. The last act of

the century was a turn back towards realism as well as the founding of Europe's first children's cultural center.

## Trends:

### Realism and Myth:

Sigmund Freud inspired an interest in myth and dreams as playwrights became familiar with his studies of psychoanalysis. Along with the help of Carl Jung, the two psychiatrists influenced playwrights to incorporate myths into their plays. This integration allowed for new opportunities for playwrights to increase the boundaries of realism within their writing. As playwrights started to use myths in their writing, a "poetic form of realism" was created. This form of realism deals with truths that are widespread amongst all humans, bolstered by Carl Jung's idea of the collective unconscious.

### Poetic Realism:

Much of the poetic realism that was written during the beginning of the twentieth century focused on the portrayals of Irish peasant life. John Millington Synge, W. B. Yeats, and Lady Gregory were but a few writers to use poetic realism. Their portrayal of peasant life was often unappealing and many audiences reacted cruelly. Many plays that are poetically realistic often have unpleasant themes running through them, such as lust between a son and his step-mother or the murder of a baby to "prove" love. These plays used myths as a surrogate

for real life in order to allow the audience to live the unpleasant plot without completely connecting to it.

**Women:**

The female characters progressed from the downtrodden, useless woman to an empowered, emancipated woman. They were used to pose subversive questions about the social order. Many female characters portray the author's masculine attitudes about women and their place in society. As time passed, though, females began gain empowerment. G. B. Shaw became one of the first English playwrights to follow Ibsen's influence and create roles of real women. Mrs. Warren, Major Barbara, and Pygmalion all have strong female leads. Women first started voting in 1918. Later in the century, females (and males) were both subjected to the alienation of society and routinely were not given names to suggest to the audience the character's worth within the play.

**Political Theatre and War:**

Political theatre uses the theatre to represent "how a social or political order uses its power to 'represent' others coercively." It uses live performances and often shows the power of politics through "demeaning and limiting" prejudices. Political theatre often represents many different types of groups that are often stereotyped – "women, gay men, lesbians, ethnic and racial groups, [and] the poor." Political theatre is used to express one's political ideas. Agitprop, a popular form of political theatre, even had its roots in the 1930s women's rights movement.

Propaganda played a big role in political theater, whether it be in support of a war or in opposition of political schemes, theater played a big role in influencing the public. The wars also affected the early theatre of the twentieth century. The consternation before WWI produced the Dada movement, the predecessor to Surrealism and Expressionism.

- **The Present Time**

Many of the 20th century musical dramas were written by Andrew Lloyd Webber, who dominated the stage at the time. His work has been immensely popular. As a result, the drama went on Broadway in New York and around the world. Some of them have also been made into feature films. Postmodernism had a major impact on the existence of British drama at the end of the 20th century. However, there are still many theaters around Shaftesbury Avenue in West London. Based in Stratford upon Avon (Shakespeare's hometown), the Royal Shakespeare Company now produces most plays written by the legendary playwright

**Types of Modern Drama:**

**Realism:**

Realism, in theater, was meant to be a direct observation of human behavior. It began as a way to make theater more useful to society, a way to hold a mirror up to society. Because of this thrust towards the "real" playwrights started using more contemporary settings, backgrounds and characters. Where plays in the past had, for the most part, used mythological or stereotypical characters, now they involved the lower class, the

poor, the rich; they involved all genders, classes and races. One of the main contributors to this style was Henrik Ibsen.

**Social Realism:**

Social Realism began showing up in plays during the 1930s. This realism had a political conscience behind it because the world was in a depression. These plays painted a harsh picture of rural poverty. The drama began to aim at showing governments the penalties of unrestrained capitalism and the depressions that lax economies created. One of the main contributors to this style was G. B. Shaw.

**Avant Garde Theatre:**

***"Dramatic truth couldn't be found in the tangibleness of realistic drama, but in symbols, images, legends, myths, fantasies, and dreams"*** (Klaus)

**Absurdist Drama:**

Absurd Drama was existentialist theatre which put a direct perception of a mode of being above all abstract considerations. It was also essentially a poetic, lyrical theatre for the expression of intuitions of being through movement, situations and concrete imagery. Language was generally downplayed. (Barnet) Symbolism, Dadaism and their offspring, Surrealism, Theatre of Cruelty, and Expressionism all fall into this category.

**Dadaism:**

Dadaism, or Dada, was a reaction against WWI. Like many of the movements, Dada included writing, painting and poetry as well as theatre. Many Dadaists wrote manifestos detailing their beliefs, which normally outlined their disgust in colonialism and nationalism and tried to be the opposite of the current aesthetics and values. The more Dada offended, the better. It was considered to be (by Dadaists), the ‘anti-art’. It rejected the values of society and turned everything on its head, preferring to disgust and offend.

**Symbolism and Aestheticism:**

In England, Symbolism was also known as Aestheticism. A very stylized format of drama, wherein dreams and fantasies were common plot devices, Aestheticism was used by numerous playwrights from Yeats to Pinter. The staging was highly stylized, usually using minimal set pieces and vague blocking. While the playwrights who could be considered Aestheticists lived and worked at the beginning of the century, it influenced all of the following styles.

**Surrealism:**

Like Aestheticism, Surrealism has its base in the mystical. It developed the physicality of theatre and downplayed words, hoping to influence its audiences through action. Other common characteristics of surreal plays are unexpected comparisons and surprise. The most famous British playwright in the 20s surrealist style is Samuel Beckett. Theatre of Cruelty is a subset of surrealism and was motivated by an idea of Antonin Artaud. It

argues the idea that theatre is a “representational medium” and tried to bring current ideas and experiences to the audience through participation and “ritualistic theater experiments.” Artaud thought that theatre should present and represent equally. This type of theatre relies deeply on metaphors and rarely included a description of how it could be performed.

**Expressionism:**

The term ‘Expressionism’ was first coined in Germany in 1911. (Michaelides) Expressionism also had its hey-day during the 20s although it had two distinct branches. The branches had characters speaking in short, direct sentences or in long, lyrical expanses. This type of theatre usually did not name the characters and spend much time lamenting the present and warning against the future. Spiritual awakenings and episodic structures were also fairly common.

**Epic Theatre:**

Epic theater was created by Bertold Brecht who rejected realistic theatre. He found that such plays were too picture-perfect. Epic Theatre is based on Greek Epic poetry. There are dramatic illusions such as “stark, harsh lighting, blank stages, placards announcing changes of scenes, bands playing music onstage, and long, discomfiting pauses” (Jacobus). Brecht believed that drama should be made within its audiences and he thought that Epic Theatre drama would reinforce the realities that people were facing rather than challenge them. Epic Theatre helped to preserve the social issues that they portrayed.

**Architecture:**

In the late nineteenth century, early twentieth century, theatre architecture changed from hosting as many audience members as possible without regarding their needs to creating better acoustical, visual, and spatial arrangements for both actors and audience members. Whereas before, theatres were cylindrical shaped, in the twentieth century fan-shaped auditoriums were favored. Audiences liked them because of the clear sight-lines and favorable acoustics and actors liked them because the natural style of acting that was becoming more popular was conducive to smaller venues. (Klaus)

There was also a renewed interest in the earlier forms of staging such as the thrust and arena stages (theatre-in-the-round). The theatre that most audiences are used to are like the pictured Olivier Theate. Everyone has basically the same view of the stage and the stage itself is viewed through the Proscenium arch, which acts as a picture frame surrounding the stage and framing the play. The Proscenium arch may be anything from a gilded, brightly lit masterpiece surrounding the curtain at the beginning of a show to the simple black walls preventing you from seeing into the wings of the theatre. In a Proscenium theatre, the action takes place either behind the Proscenium or slightly in front of it, on what is known as the apron of a stage. (The piece closest to the audience and which the curtain generally does not hide.) In a thrust theatre, the action takes place almost completely in front of the ‘Proscenium arch’, if indeed there is one. The audience is seated on three sides of the stage and many of these types of theatres make great use of

entrances and exits by the hallways through the audience. An arena stage has audience seating on all four sides and has four entrances/exits called vomitoria. (from the Latin ‘vomitorium’ meaning (generally): [an audience] spews forth from them). In today’s American culture, arena stages (and vomitoria) are most commonly found as sports arena.

Found Space is another recycled theatrical convention. The term ‘Found Space’ refers to streets, personal homes, a grocery store, anywhere that is not specifically designated as a theatre.

**Set:**

The set in a theatre is the background upon which the story is told. It can be anything from a very detailed box set (explained below) to absolutely nothing. The set can be physical platforms and walls or it can be projections on sheets.

The box set, or three walls designed to look like the interior of a house, complete with doors, windows and furniture, figured prominently in most, if not all, of the plays performed in the modern realistic tradition at the beginning of the 20th Century. (Klaus)

**Lighting:**

Before the invention of the electric light bulb in 1879, theatres used either gas or carbon arc lamps. Both gas and

carbon arc lamps were prone to fires. Numerous theatres had switched to the carbon arc lamp during the 1840s, but since the concept of the arc lamp is to send voltage through the open air, there was still a high chance of fire. The Savoy in London was the first public building to operate completely on electricity. In 1882, a year after the Savoy opened, the Munich Exposition displayed an electrified theatre, marking the beginning of a general change-over to electricity-lit theatres. Existing theatres that already had gas lines repurposed them by threading wires through the old gas lines and inserting a row of light bulbs in front of the gas jets.

Unfortunately, electricity had quite a few drawbacks. The set designers or scenographers (combination set designer/ costume designer) did not adapt to the new medium, creating sets that were unsuited to electric light placement. A second drawback was that electricity itself was very dangerous and electricians were hard to find. It might not be as dangerous as gas, but there was still the chance of fire. The front boards, also known as control panels (see above), were live, with handles that could be in an ‘on’ or ‘off’ position. The ‘on’ position did not have protection of any sort, and if the operator was not careful, he or she could die. In the photo to the left, technology had advanced enough for fuses. The third drawback to electricity was that it required a lot of power. Theatres often had to own the generators powering their theatres.

Gordon Craig, a British actor, director, producer, and scenic designer made invaluable contributions to lighting. Instead of putting most of his lights at the foot of the stage

(known as footlights or floaters), he hung lighting instruments above the stage. He, along with Adolphe Appia of Switzerland, also realized the dramatic potential of lighting, playing with color and form. Appia also established the first goals of stage lighting in his books: *La Mise en scène du drame Wagnérien* or *The Staging of the Wagnerian Drama* and *L'Oeuvre d'art vivant* (1921) or *The Living Work of Art*. (Adolphe) (1895)

An American named Jean Rosenthal created the post of 'lighting designer' within the theatre world. Before her career in the 1950s, either the master electrician or the set designer would light the play. After her integral designs with the Martha Graham Dance Company and on Broadway, the position of Lighting Designer was added to the production staff. Many designers today credit her with specific lighting techniques and lovingly refer to her as the Mother of Stage Lighting. (Wild)

**Advances on the Continent and their Impact on British Drama:**

Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's plays were first translated and performed in England in London, 1888. His startling Realist drama jumpstarted modern British drama. "His… serious drama based on moral and social issues hung over what has been called 'the minority theatre [the 'Off-Broadway of England]'" (Smart). Ibsen and Frenchman André Antoine pioneered the era of naturalistic drama that later snuck into England through writers in the early 20th Century.

In Germany after the Franco-Prussian War, Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, became the first modern director. He enjoyed plays so much that he built a stage, hired actors, had scripts written, and (because he financed it) told everyone what they should do. His productions eventually became the Meiningen Ensemble and toured Europe and England extensively, profoundly altering the actor/director, manger/director or writer/director mindset of the past.

In Russia, Constantine Stanislavski organized the ideas of the Duke of Saxe Meiningen and of André Antoine into the Stanislavski Method of acting. Stanislavski brought the Eastern belief in dedication to the trade (some Japanese actors spend 30 years developing their craft (Worthen)) to the Western world. The Stanislavski Method states that the actor's primary goal is to be believed. It tells the actor that s/he must use his or her own memories to evoke emotions. The Western world accepted this view and used this method to teach it's actors for many 20th Century realist actors, although towards the 1990s this method has fallen out of vogue. (American, Sawoski) Antonin Artaud was a contemporary of Samuel Beckett's. He created what is known as the Theatre of Cruelty.

## Modern American Drama

Drama experienced a slow start in the United States, largely thanks to Puritan values that frowned upon the theatre. However, by the middle of the 20th century, American playwrights began making up for lost time, and modern American drama contains some of the United States' most

important dramatic works. From 1945 until today, modern American drama has produced a dizzying array of diverse work that is read and produced worldwide.

## Modern American Drama: A Summary

Modern American Drama generally refers to dramatic works produced in the United States after World War II, beginning in the middle of the 20th century. This period encompasses most of the United States's best-known classic playwrights, including Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953), Arthur Miller (1915-2005), and Tennessee Williams (1911-1983), as well as contemporary writers such as Tony Kushner (1956-present), David Henry Hwang (1957-present), and Ayad Akhtar (1970-present).

Modern American drama is a diverse body of work encompassing many different genres, themes, styles, and viewpoints. It occupies an essential place in the landscape of English literature. Modern American dramas are read and staged worldwide.

## The History of Modern American Drama

The history of modern American drama begins with the dawn of literary **Realism** in Europe in the mid- to late-19th century. Playwrights including Norwegian Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), Swedish August Strindberg (1849-1912), and Russian Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) changed the face of European theatre with their plays that abandoned traditional theatrical

conventions in favor of more realistic, deeply psychological dramas.

**Realism** is a literary movement that began in Europe in the mid-19th century. Writers rejected Romanticism's sentimentality and produced works that were more realistic and true to daily life.
This new concept of drama arrived in the United States by the start of the 20th century, where it would shape the first generation of great American playwrights.

Prior to the 20th century, American drama existed almost entirely for popular entertainment in the form of melodramas, minstrel shows, and classic works of theatre imported from Europe. Drama was not an integral part of American literature, and almost no meaningful works of original theatre were produced in the United States.

All that changed with the work of Eugene O'Neill, known as the father of American drama. O'Neill won the 1936 Nobel Prize for Literature, the first and only American playwright to have done so, and began the movement of modern American drama. O'Neill was heavily influenced by playwrights such as Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov and the theatrical **Expression-ist** movement that began in Germany in the early part of the 20th century.

**Expressionism** was a theatrical movement that used exaggerated, unrealistic, or distorted staging or production elements to better express characters' intense inner emotions.

The end of World War II in 1945 marked the start of the modern literary period, and the post-war years saw a proliferation of American drama. A number of key American playwrights had begun working in the preceding years, but they produced some of their best work after 1945. These included Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (1946), Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949)

The first works of modern American drama were mostly tragedies. These playwrights brought American drama to the world stage and elevated it as a legitimate literary form. Much of the early modern American drama was highly psychological in nature. Playwrights like Williams and Miller explored the inner lives of their characters, which they used to make more universal statements about the state of the American psyche and the plight of the working class.

As the 20th century continued, American drama kept expanding and diversifying. Several African American playwrights rose to prominence, including Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965) and Amiri Baraka (1934-2014), and later other viewpoints were incorporated as well, such as Chinese American David Henry Hwang (1957-present) and Pakistani American Ayad Akhtar (1970-present).

**Characteristics of Modern American Drama**

Modern American drama embraces a wide variety of styles and themes that often seem to share few unifying characteristics. Modern productions can be hyper-realistic,

totally experimental, or anything in between. They can be musicals, tragedies, or comedies; they can be brief one-act plays or full-length productions. More than anything, American playwrights are known for the diversity of their work and their willingness to experiment.

However, for all its differences, modern American drama does share some common characteristics:

1. **Realism and authenticity:** Modern American drama emphasizes realism and authenticity, depicting characters and situations that accurately reflect the social and political realities of their time.

2. **Social relevance:** Many modern American plays address social issues, such as race, gender, class, and politics, reflecting the cultural and political landscape of the United States.

3. **Psychological complexity:** Modern American drama often explores the inner lives of characters, delving into their motivations, fears, and desires.

4. **Non-linear storytelling:** Many modern American plays employ non-linear storytelling techniques, using flash-backs, dream sequences, and other devices to challenge traditional narrative structures.

5. **Symbolism and metaphor:** Modern American drama often incorporates symbolism and metaphor, using imagery and symbolism to convey deeper meanings and themes.

6. **Experimentation:** Many modern American playwrights experiment with form, style, and structure, pushing the boundaries of traditional theatrical conventions.

7. **Exploration of the human condition:** Modern American drama often explores the darker aspects of the human experience, such as family conflict, personal ambition, and societal pressure.

Modern American drama is often a place for authors to unpack the nuances of **American identity**. Many playwrights choose to focus on the common man, the poor, or members of the working class. This marked a stark departure from previous eras of drama where classics such as the works of Shakespeare often focused on royalty or the upper classes and relied on the supernatural and theatrical gimmicks to generate intrigue. Modern American playwrights turned instead to explore the effects of American society on individuals and their relationships with others, particularly conflicts within the traditional American family.

Many American playwrights frequently draw on current social issues and critique American social norms, showing the effects of modern society on the everyday lives of American people. Modern American drama has also become a repository for a diverse array of voices that represent the many facets of the American experience.

**Examples of Modern American Drama:**

There are many excellent examples of modern American drama. This selection helps to illustrate the breadth and variety of dramatic works produced in the United States.

**Early Modern American Drama:**

The early years of modern American drama, beginning in 1945, included some of the most canonical works of American drama. These included:

- *The Iceman Cometh* (1946) by Eugene O'Neill
- *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) by Tennessee Williams
- *Death of a Salesman* (1949) by Arthur Miller
- *The Crucible* (1953) by Arthur Miller
- *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) by Tennessee Williams
- *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) by Eugene O'Neill

The most influential plays written at the start of the modern period were mostly tragedies that established modern American drama as a part of American literature worthy of international attention.

## Late 20th Century American Drama:

By the late 20th century, American drama had expanded into the diverse array of work we see today. Some key works include:

- *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) by Lorraine Hansberry
- *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf???* (1962) by Edward Albee (1928-2016)

- *Dutchman* (1964) by Amiri Baraka
- *Buried Child* (1978) by Sam Shepard (1943-2017)
- *Fences* (1985) by August Wilson (1945-2005)
- *M. Butterfly* (1988) by David Henry Hwang
- *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1991) by Tony Kushner

Much of the subject matter of the best-known American plays from the late 20th century remained quite serious. However, writers became more diverse, exploring feminist themes, the African American perspective, queer points of view, and more.

Contemporary American Drama

21st-century American drama has continued to expand and diversify. Some noteworthy examples include the following:

- *Miss Witherspoon* (2005) by Christopher Durang (1949-present)
- *August: Osage County* (2007) by Tracy Letts (1965-present)
- *Disgraced* (2012) by Ayad Akhtar
- *Hamilton* (2016) by Lin Manuel Miranda (1980-present)
- *The Hot Wing King* (2020) by Katori Hall (1981-present)

Some works, like Tracy Letts' *August: Osage County,* revisit themes that have appeared in American drama for years, including dysfunctional family dynamics and interpersonal relationships. Other works from the 21st century present themes

previously absent from the American stage. For example, Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* explores Muslim American identity and Islamophobia in the post-9/11 United States, and Katori Hall's *The Hot Wing King* features the first mainstream production to feature a gay African American couple as leading characters.

Lin Manuel Miranda's Tony Award-winning musical *Hamilton* is one of only ten musicals to have won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

### *Major Themes of Modern American Drama:*

Some major themes of modern American drama include American identity, social issues, and the American family.

**American Identity:**

An important theme in modern American drama is exploring the nuances of American identity. American playwrights delve deeply into the psyches of individual characters to explore ideas central to the country's sense of collective identity, such as the American Dream and the construction of the American nuclear family.

One classic example is Arthur Miller's 1949 tragedy, *Death of a Salesman,* in which Willy Loman pours himself into pursuing the American Dream. He believes that becoming a successful salesman will make him happy; however, reality fails to meet his expectations and undermines his sense of identity, leading to his eventual suicide. The play explores Willy's experience while

simultaneously critiquing the illusion of the American Dream and the failings of capitalism in the United States.

Popular theatre on Broadway has continued to diversify in recent years. In recent years, American drama has continued to diversify, allowing for various perspectives on American identity. Including writers from various marginalized communities has helped modern American drama create a more complex, complete, and multifaceted vision of American identity.

## Social Issues:

Many American playwrights frequently draw on current social issues and critique American social norms. Playwrights use their work to examine important social, political, and environmental issues and explore their effect on the everyday lives of Americans.

Works like Megan Terry's *Viet Rock* (1966) protested the Vietnam War, Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* dramatized the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, and Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* (2012) explored Islamophobia in a post-9/11 United States.

### The American Family:

American family dynamics are a reoccurring theme in much of modern American drama. From Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams to Sam Shepard and Tracy Letts, dysfunctional American families have long populated the American stage.

Works like Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Tennessee William's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Sam Shephard's *Buried Child,* and Tracy Letts' *August: Osage County* have all but established the dysfunctional family drama as its own genre of American drama.

These and other works generally explore the disintegration of an American family as members deal with addiction, secrets, and failed expectations.

***Modern American Drama - Key takeaways:***

- Modern American drama refers to drama written in the United States from 1945 to today.
- Modern American drama includes many of the most important pieces in the canon of American drama.
- Just a few of the many playwrights associated with modern American drama include Tennessee Williams, Sam Shepard, Lorraine Hansberry, and David Henry Hwang.
- Some important works of modern American drama are *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee, and *Hamilton* by Lin Manuel Miranda.

- Some key themes of modern American drama are American identity, social issues, and the American family.

***Common Questions about Modern American Drama***

**(1)- What are the characteristics of modern American drama?**

Modern American drama is a diverse body of work that shares a few common characteristics such as realism, authenticity, social relevance, non-linear storytelling, experimentation, and psychological complexity.

**(2)- What are modern drama examples?**

Some examples of modern American drama are *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee, and *Hamilton* by Lin Manuel Miranda.

(3)- **What is American drama?**

American drama is generally defined as theatrical works written in English by authors in the United States.

**(4)- Who established modern American drama?**

Eugene O'Neill, regarded as the first great American playwright, began working in the early 20th century. His work spilled into the period of modern American drama and had a great impact on the movement's development.

**(5)- How is modern American drama different from traditional drama?**

Previous to the start of modern American drama, the theatre produced in the United States was purely for popular entertainment and had little literary merit. The first playwrights of modern American drama wrote plays of high literary quality that were more serious and realistic than the theatre traditionally produced in the United States.

**By Arthur Miller**

**Climax:** The scene in Frank's Chop House and Biff's final confrontation with Willy at home.

**Protagonists:** Willy Loman, Biff Loman.

**Antagonists:** Biff Loman, Willy Loman, the American Dream.

**Setting (Time):** "Today," that is, the present; either the late 1940s or the time period in which the play is being produced, with "daydreams" into Willy's past; all of the action takes place during a twenty-four-hour period between Monday night and Tuesday night, except the "Requiem," which takes place, presumably, a few days after Willy's funeral.

**Setting (Place):** According to the stage directions, "Willy Loman's house and yard [in Brooklyn] and . . . various places he visits in . . . New York and Boston".

**Falling Action:** The "Requiem" section, although the play is not really structured as a classical drama.

**Tense:** Present.

**Foreshadowing:** Willy's flute theme foreshadows the revelation of his father's occupation and abandonment; Willy's preoccupation with Linda's stockings foreshadows his affair with The Woman;

Willy's automobile accident before the start of Act I foreshadows his suicide at the end of Act II.

**Tone:** The tone of Miller's stage directions and dialogue ranges from sincere to parodying, but, in general, the treatment is tender, though at times brutally honest, toward Willy's plight.

**Themes:** The American Dream; abandonment; betrayal.

**Motifs:** Mythic figures; the American West; Alaska; the African jungle.

**Symbols:** Seeds; diamonds; Linda's and The Woman's stockings; the rubber hose.

### *Character List*

**Willy Loman:**
An insecure, self-deluded traveling salesman.

Biff Loman:

Willy's thirty-four-year-old elder son.

**Happy Loman:**
Willy's thirty-two-year-old younger son. Happy has lived in Biff's shadow all of his life, but he compensates by nurturing his relentless sex drive and professional ambition.

**Linda Loman:**

Willy's loyal, loving wife. Linda suffers through Willy's grandiose dreams and self-delusions.

**Charley:**

Willy's next-door neighbor. Charley owns a successful business and his son, Bernard, is a wealthy, important lawyer. Willy is jealous of Charley's success. Charley gives Willy money to pay his bills, and Willy reveals at one point, choking back tears, that Charley is his only friend.

**Bernard:**

Bernard is Charley's son and an important, successful lawyer. Although Willy used to mock Bernard for studying hard, Bernard always loved Willy's sons dearly and regarded Biff as a hero. Bernard's success is difficult for Willy to accept because his own sons' lives do not measure up.

**Ben:**

Willy's wealthy older brother. Ben has recently died and appears only in Willy's "daydreams." Willy regards Ben as a symbol of the success that he so desperately craves for himself and his sons.

**The Woman:**

Willy's mistress when Happy and Biff were in high school. The Woman's attention and admiration boost Willy's fragile ego. When Biff catches Willy in his hotel room with The Woman, he loses faith in his father, and his dream of passing math and going to college dies.

**Howard Wagner:**

Willy's boss. Howard inherited the company from his father, whom Willy regarded as "a masterful man" and "a prince." Though much younger than Willy, Howard treats Willy with condescension and eventually fires him, despite Willy's wounded assertions that he named Howard at his birth.

**Stanley:**

A waiter at Frank's Chop House. Stanley and Happy seem to be friends, or at least acquaintances, and they banter about and ogle Miss Forsythe together before Biff and Willy arrive at the restaurant.

**Miss Forsythe and Letta:**

Two young women whom Happy and Biff meet at Frank's Chop House. It seems likely that Miss Forsythe and Letta are prostitutes, judging from Happy's repeated comments about their moral character and the fact that they are "on call."

**Jenny:**

Charley's secretary.

## Summary of the play

As a flute melody plays, Willy Loman returns to his home in Brooklyn one night, exhausted from a failed sales trip. His wife, Linda, tries to persuade him to ask his boss, Howard Wagner, to let him work in New York so that he won't have to travel. Willy says that he will talk to Howard the next day. Willy complains that Biff, his older son who has come back home to visit, has yet to make something of himself. Linda scolds Willy for being so critical, and Willy goes to the kitchen for a snack.

As Willy talks to himself in the kitchen, Biff and his younger brother, Happy, who is also visiting, reminisce about their adolescence and discuss their father's babbling, which often includes criticism of Biff's failure to live up to Willy's expectations. As Biff and Happy, dissatisfied with their lives, fantasize about buying a ranch out West, Willy becomes immersed in a daydream. He praises his sons, now younger, who are washing his car. The young Biff, a high school football star, and the young Happy appear. They interact affectionately with their father, who has just returned from a business trip. Willy confides in Biff and Happy that he is going to open his own business one day, bigger than that owned by his neighbor, Charley. Charley's son, Bernard, enters looking for Biff, who must study for math class in order to avoid failing. Willy points out to his sons that although Bernard is smart, he is not "well liked," which will hurt him in the long run.

A younger Linda enters, and the boys leave to do some chores. Willy boasts of a phenomenally successful sales trip, but Linda coaxes him into revealing that his trip was actually only meagerly successful. Willy complains that he soon won't be able

to make all of the payments on their appliances and car. He complains that people don't like him and that he's not good at his job. As Linda consoles him, he hears the laughter of his mistress. He approaches The Woman, who is still laughing, and engages in another reminiscent daydream. Willy and The Woman flirt, and she thanks him for giving her stockings.

The Woman disappears, and Willy fades back into his prior daydream, in the kitchen. Linda, now mending stockings, reassures him. He scolds her mending and orders her to throw the stockings out. Bernard bursts in, again looking for Biff. Linda reminds Willy that Biff has to return a football that he stole, and she adds that Biff is too rough with the neighborhood girls. Willy hears The Woman laugh and explodes at Bernard and Linda. Both leave, and though the daydream ends, Willy continues to mutter to himself. The older Happy comes downstairs and tries to quiet Willy. Agitated, Willy shouts his regret about not going to Alaska with his brother, Ben, who eventually found a diamond mine in Africa and became rich. Charley, having heard the commotion, enters. Happy goes off to bed, and Willy and Charley begin to play cards. Charley offers Willy a job, but Willy, insulted, refuses it. As they argue, Willy imagines that Ben enters. Willy accidentally calls Charley Ben. Ben inspects Willy's house and tells him that he has to catch a train soon to look at properties in Alaska. As Willy talks to Ben about the prospect of going to Alaska, Charley, seeing no one there, gets confused and questions Willy. Willy yells at Charley, who leaves. The younger Linda enters and Ben meets her. Willy asks Ben impatiently about his life. Ben recounts his travels and talks about their father. As Ben is about to leave, Willy daydreams

further, and Charley and Bernard rush in to tell him that Biff and Happy are stealing lumber. Although Ben eventually leaves, Willy continues to talk to him.

Back in the present, the older Linda enters to find Willy outside. Biff and Happy come downstairs and discuss Willy's condition with their mother. Linda scolds Biff for judging Willy harshly. Biff tells her that he knows Willy is a fake, but he refuses to elaborate. Linda mentions that Willy has tried to commit suicide. Happy grows angry and rebukes Biff for his failure in the business world. Willy enters and yells at Biff. Happy intervenes and eventually proposes that he and Biff go into the sporting goods business together. Willy immediately brightens and gives Biff a host of tips about asking for a loan from one of Biff's old employers, Bill Oliver. After more arguing and reconciliation, everyone finally goes to bed.

Act II opens with Willy enjoying the breakfast that Linda has made for him. Willy ponders the bright-seeming future before getting angry again about his expensive appliances. Linda informs Willy that Biff and Happy are taking him out to dinner that night. Excited, Willy announces that he is going to make Howard Wagner give him a New York job. The phone rings, and Linda chats with Biff, reminding him to be nice to his father at the restaurant that night.

As the lights fade on Linda, they come up on Howard playing with a wire recorder in his office. Willy tries to broach the subject of working in New York, but Howard interrupts him and makes him listen to his kids and wife on the wire recorder. When

Willy finally gets a word in, Howard rejects his plea. Willy launches into a lengthy recalling of how a legendary salesman named Dave Singleman inspired him to go into sales. Howard leaves and Willy gets angry. Howard soon re-enters and tells Willy to take some time off. Howard leaves and Ben enters, inviting Willy to join him in Alaska. The younger Linda enters and reminds Willy of his sons and job. The young Biff enters, and Willy praises Biff's prospects and the fact that he is well liked.

Ben leaves and Bernard rushes in, eagerly awaiting Biff's big football game. Willy speaks optimistically to Biff about the game. Charley enters and teases Willy about the game. As Willy chases Charley off, the lights rise on a different part of the stage. Willy continues yelling from offstage, and Jenny, Charley's secretary, asks a grown-up Bernard to quiet him down. Willy enters and prattles on about a "very big deal" that Biff is working on. Daunted by Bernard's success (he mentions to Willy that he is going to Washington to fight a case), Willy asks Bernard why Biff turned out to be such a failure. Bernard asks Willy what happened in Boston that made Biff decide not to go to summer school. Willy defensively tells Bernard not to blame him.

Charley enters and sees Bernard off. When Willy asks for more money than Charley usually loans him, Charley again offers Willy a job. Willy again refuses and eventually tells Charley that he was fired. Charley scolds Willy for always needing to be liked and angrily gives him the money. Calling Charley his only friend, Willy exits on the verge of tears.

At Frank's Chop House, Happy helps Stanley, a waiter, prepare a table. They ogle and chat up a girl, Miss Forsythe, who enters the restaurant. Biff enters, and Happy introduces him to Miss Forsythe, continuing to flirt with her. Miss Forsythe, a call girl, leaves to telephone another call girl (at Happy's request), and Biff spills out that he waited six hours for Bill Oliver and Oliver didn't even recognize him. Upset at his father's unrelenting misconception that he, Biff, was a salesman for Oliver, Biff plans to relieve Willy of his illusions. Willy enters, and Biff tries gently, at first, to tell him what happened at Oliver's office. Willy blurts out that he was fired. Stunned, Biff again tries to let Willy down easily. Happy cuts in with remarks suggesting Biff's success, and Willy eagerly awaits the good news.

Biff finally explodes at Willy for being unwilling to listen. The young Bernard runs in shouting for Linda, and Biff, Happy, and Willy start to argue. As Biff explains what happened, their conversation recedes into the background. The young Bernard tells Linda that Biff failed math. The restaurant conversation comes back into focus and Willy criticizes Biff for failing math. Willy then hears the voice of the hotel operator in Boston and shouts that he is not in his room. Biff scrambles to quiet Willy and claims that Oliver is talking to his partner about giving Biff the money. Willy's renewed interest and probing questions irk Biff more, and he screams at Willy. Willy hears The Woman laugh and he shouts back at Biff, hitting him and staggering. Miss Forsythe enters with another call girl, Letta. Biff helps Willy to the washroom and, finding Happy flirting with the girls, argues with him about Willy. Biff storms out, and Happy follows with the girls.

Willy and The Woman enter, dressing themselves and flirting. The door knocks and Willy hurries The Woman into the bathroom. Willy answers the door; the young Biff enters and tells Willy that he failed math. Willy tries to usher him out of the room, but Biff imitates his math teacher's lisp, which elicits laughter from Willy and The Woman. Willy tries to cover up his indiscretion, but Biff refuses to believe his stories and storms out, dejected, calling Willy a "phony little fake." Back in the restaurant, Stanley helps Willy up. Willy asks him where he can find a seed store. Stanley gives him directions to one, and Willy hurries off.

The light comes up on the Loman kitchen, where Happy enters looking for Willy. He moves into the living room and sees Linda. Biff comes inside and Linda scolds the boys and slaps away the flowers in Happy's hand. She yells at them for abandoning Willy. Happy attempts to appease her, but Biff goes in search of Willy. He finds Willy planting seeds in the garden with a flashlight. Willy is consulting Ben about a $20,000 proposition. Biff approaches him to say goodbye and tries to bring him inside. Willy moves into the house, followed by Biff, and becomes angry again about Biff's failure. Happy tries to calm Biff, but Biff and Willy erupt in fury at each other. Biff starts to sob, which touches Willy. Everyone goes to bed except Willy, who renews his conversation with Ben, elated at how great Biff will be with $20,000 of insurance money. Linda soon calls out for Willy but gets no response. Biff and Happy listen as well. They hear Willy's car speed away.

In the requiem, Linda and Happy stand in shock after Willy's poorly attended funeral. Biff states that Willy had the wrong dreams. Charley defends Willy as a victim of his profession. Ready to leave, Biff invites Happy to go back out West with him. Happy declares that he will stick it out in New York to validate Willy's death. Linda asks Willy for forgiveness for being unable to cry. She begins to sob, repeating "We're free. . . ." All exit, and the flute melody is heard as the curtain falls.

## *Analysis of the play*

Arthur Miller's 1949 play, *Death of a Salesman*, explores the promises and perils of the American Dream. As the Loman family struggles with what it means to be successful and happy in post-war America, its members serve as symbolic representations of the struggle to define that dream. The play ends with the death of one salesman's Sisyphean hope for wealth and universal acclaim, yet it glimmers with hope for his son, who finally turns toward a life of meaningful work and self-realization.

As the play opens, Willy Loman—heavy with physical weight and the weighted burden of serving as a breadwinner—has recently returned home to Brooklyn after an unsuccessful sales trip. His two sons, Biff and Happy, are visiting. However, the play constantly shifts between past and present, creating a disorientation of time that is reflected in dialogue. These shifts emphasize the role of memory and draw attention to one of the main character's internal conflicts: Willy struggles against his own false hopes for his children. He often contradicts himself as he remembers his sons' childhoods through a nostalgic lens, infusing the past with an idealism that did not necessarily exist. His own childhood family had been a broken one mired with abandonment—first by his father and then by his brother. Willy's desperate longing for material success and universal acceptance may stem from the insecurities he developed as a result of this childhood abandonment. Even Willy's mistress, "The Woman," represents his discontent in life; she is as nameless as the wares that he peddles.

Willy puts an enormous amount of pressure on his children to fulfill that which he himself could not. He is neither a good salesman nor is he “well-liked,” and he plays the role of salesman with his wife and children by peddling the fantasy that he is more successful and appreciated than he really is. Willy futilely compares his success to that of his neighbor, Uncle Charley, by measuring his boys up to Charley’s son, Bernard. In contrast to the elusiveness of the American Dream that Willy will never achieve, Charley and Bernard are financially secure their whole lives, achieving success as a result of hard work, not physical appearance or popularity.

The play’s inciting incident draws attention to Willy’s struggle to accept the truth about himself. When Willy goes to see his younger boss, Howard, to ask for a non-traveling job with a steadier paycheck, Howard patronizes and belittles him. Willy falls into the role of an “office boy,” attending to the menial task of retrieving Howard’s lighter. As the tension between them escalates and Willy’s erratic behavior perturbs his boss, Howard handily defeats Willy and fires him. It takes multiple attempts for Willy to realize what has happened and for that reality to be accepted.

As the rising action drives events toward the play’s climax, Willy is forced to confront the truth that he denies. He has failed to understand or achieve the American Dream, and that failure has affected his sons. He heads to Frank’s Chop House to discuss “the Florida idea”—a publicity campaign concocted by his two sons—with Biff and Happy. Biff has continuously jumped from job to job, and, after a promising football career in school, is

a disappointment. Happy has a steady job but does not enjoy the rat race, living an immoral life of dalliances with his supervisors' partners and taking bribes to climb the corporate ladder. Willy has passed along his false notion of the American Dream to his sons, and the climax of the play occurs when Biff attempts to confront his father about his delusions. Willy, still deluded, is abandoned by his sons at the restaurant.

During the play's falling action, Miller suggests that Willy's central misunderstanding has been that he has ignored certain values inherent in a more complete sense of the American Dream. Back home, Willy's frantic hunt for seeds leads him to his garden where he claims that "Nothing's planted" and that he doesn't "have a thing in the ground." Willy's lack of physical and familial roots are metaphors for his unfulfilled dreams, and their home, once symbolic of growth and expansion, is now surrounded by the congestion of apartment buildings. Willy is unable to separate the professional from the personal, and he does not understand the more important foundations of family love, unconditional support, and freedom of choice, which are also aspects of the American Dream.

The resolution of the play, following Willy's suicide to earn his family his $20,000 life insurance policy, suggests its ironic message. Willy, despite his own vision of himself, has a sparsely attended funeral; only his family and neighbors are present. This unheroic funeral stands in stark contrast to that of Willy's idealized fellow salesman, Dave Singleman. Singleman had hundreds of attendees because he was so financially and personally successful. Willy, on the other hand, bought a false

and insufficient dream of what America offers, costing him his life. As the play closes, Miller resolves its central conflicts by suggesting a degree of hope. Biff, disabused of his father's false hopes, develops a sense of self-realization that leaves him with the promise of a new, more solid American Dream for a Loman man.

## *Themes*

*Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work. The following are outstanding themes in Death of a Salesman:*

**(1)- The American Dream:**

Willy believes wholeheartedly in what he considers the promise of the American Dream—that a "well liked" and "personally attractive" man in business will indubitably and deservedly acquire the material comforts offered by modern American life. Oddly, his fixation with the superficial qualities of attractiveness and likeability is at odds with a more gritty, more rewarding understanding of the American Dream that identifies hard work without complaint as the key to success. Willy's interpretation of likeability is superficial—he childishly dislikes Bernard because he considers Bernard a nerd. Willy's blind faith in his stunted version of the American Dream leads to his rapid psychological decline when he is unable to accept the disparity between the Dream and his own life.

(2)- **Abandonment:**

Willy's life charts a course from one abandonment to the next, leaving him in greater despair each time. Willy's father leaves him and Ben when Willy is very young, leaving Willy neither a tangible (money) nor an intangible (history) legacy. Ben eventually departs for Alaska, leaving Willy to lose himself in a warped vision of the American Dream. Likely a result of these early experiences, Willy develops a fear of abandonment, which makes him want his family to conform to the American Dream. His efforts to raise perfect sons, however, reflect his inability to understand reality. The young Biff, whom Willy considers the embodiment of promise, drops Willy and Willy's zealous ambitions for him when he finds out about Willy's adultery. Biff's ongoing inability to succeed in business furthers his estrangement from Willy. When, at Frank's Chop House, Willy finally believes that Biff is on the cusp of greatness, Biff shatters Willy's illusions and, along with Happy, abandons the deluded, babbling Willy in the washroom.

**(3)- Betrayal:**

Willy's primary obsession throughout the play is what he considers to be Biff's betrayal of his ambitions for him. Willy believes that he has every right to expect Biff to fulfill the promise inherent in him. When Biff walks out on Willy's ambitions for him, Willy takes this rejection as a personal affront (he associates it with "insult" and "spite"). Willy, after all, is a salesman, and Biff's ego-crushing rebuff ultimately reflects Willy's inability to sell him on the American Dream—the product in which Willy himself believes most faithfully. Willy assumes that Biff's betrayal stems from Biff's discovery of Willy's affair with The Woman—a betrayal of Linda's love. Whereas Willy feels

that Biff has betrayed him, Biff feels that Willy, a “phony little fake,” has betrayed *him* with his unending stream of ego-stroking lies.

**(4)- Motifs:**

*Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text’s major themes. Consider the following motifs in the play:*

**(A)- Paralysis:**

In most of the stories in *Dubliners*, a character has a desire, faces obstacles to it, then ultimately relents and suddenly stops all action. These moments of paralysis show the characters’ inability to change their lives and reverse the routines that hamper their wishes. Such immobility fixes the Dubliners in cycles of experience. The young boy in “Araby” halts in the middle of the dark bazaar, knowing that he will never escape the tedious delays of Dublin and attain love. Eveline freezes like an animal, fearing the possible new experience of life away from home. These moments evoke the theme of death in life as they show characters in a state of inaction and numbness. The opening story introduces this motif through the character of Father Flynn, whose literal paralysis traps him in a state suspended between life and death. Throughout the collection, this stifling state appears as part of daily life in Dublin, which all Dubliners ultimately acknowledge and accept.

**(B)- The Damaged Psyche of Humanity:**

Like many modernist writers, Eliot wanted his poetry to express the fragile psychological state of humanity in the twentieth century. The passing of Victorian ideals and the trauma of World War I challenged cultural notions of masculine identity, causing artists to question the romantic literary ideal of a visionary-poet capable of changing the world through verse. Modernist writers wanted to capture their transformed world, which they perceived as fractured, alienated, and denigrated. Europe lost an entire generation of young men to the horrors of the so-called Great War, causing a general crisis of masculinity as survivors struggled to find their place in a radically altered society. As for England, the aftershocks of World War I directly contributed to the dissolution of the British Empire. Eliot saw society as paralyzed and wounded, and he imagined that culture was crumbling and dissolving. “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1917) demonstrates this sense of indecisive paralysis as the titular speaker wonders whether he should eat a piece of fruit, make a radical change, or if he has the fortitude to keep living. Humanity’s collectively damaged psyche prevented people from communicating with one another, an idea that Eliot explored in many works, including “A Game of Chess” (the second part of *The Waste Land*) and “The Hollow Men.”

**(C)- The American Dream:**

A melody is heard, played upon a flute. It is small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon. The curtain rises. Before us is the Salesman’s house. We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding it on all sides. Only the blue light of the sky falls upon the house and forestage; the surrounding area shows an angry glow of orange.

The first sentences of the play are stage directions. The author specifies audio and visual details that present two elements of the American Dream: open horizons and home ownership. The house represents the fulfillment of an ordinary American's dream to have a home and land of one's own. The set design and lighting directions call for a stark contrast between the house and the surrounding buildings. Even before the characters enter and speak, the audience understands that the Salesman's house—one family's American Dream—is under threat.

**[BIFF**:] Sure, maybe we could buy a ranch. Raise cattle, use our muscles. Men built like we are should be working out in the open. HAPPY, avidly: The Loman Brothers**,** eh?

Biff and Happy, the two grown sons of Willy and Linda Loman, are visiting their parents and sleeping in their old bedroom. As they try to fall asleep, Biff shares with Happy his own version of the American Dream—owning a ranch out West. Happy's reference to the Loman Brothers suggests that the dream of owning a ranch is a fantasy from western movies. The scene shows that both boys have learned their father's optimism about America, as well as his tendency to create unrealistic expectations.

What's the mystery? The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into a jungle, and comes out, at the age of twenty-one, and he's rich! The world is an oyster, but you don't crack it open on a mattress!

Willy Loman is talking to his son Happy about Ben, Willy's older brother. Ben, Willy's hero, fulfilled the American Dream by

going to Africa and striking it rich in diamonds. Willy describes Ben as a masterful man, ready to take risks and work hard toward his goal—a perfect role model for Willy's sons. But although a real actor plays him onstage, Ben is a figment of Willy's memories and fantasies. Ben's success, real or imagined, allows Willy to express hopeful belief in opportunity, hard work, and success even as he is confronting his own failure.

All right, boy. I'm gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's the only dream to have—to come out number-one man. He fought it out here, and this where I'm gonna win it for him.

Happy Loman is talking to his brother Biff as they stand at their father's graveside at the end of the play. In his grief and guilt over his father's death, Happy is reaffirming his father's values—the belief in the American Dream. Happy is also recognizing the heroic quality of his father's struggle to succeed. The audience has already seen considerable evidence that Happy is no more likely to succeed than his father, largely because of false assumptions and fantasies about what it takes to be a success.

**(5)- Self-Deception:**

> **"**That's just what I mean. Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man

> who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. “Willy Loman is here!” That’s all they have to know, and I go right through**.”**

Willy Loman is talking to his sons as part of a memory from Biff’s senior year in high school. Bernard, Biff’s friend and rival, has just warned them that Biff is in danger of flunking math. Willy is trying to bolster Biff’s confidence. Willy’s speech shows how much he depends on self-deception for his own self-esteem. He has convinced himself that appearance means more than doing well in school, his own boys are as handsome as Greek gods, and he himself is good-looking, well liked, and successful.

> “Like a young god. Hercules—something like that. And the sun, the sun all around him. Remember how he waved to me? Right up from the field, with the representatives of three colleges standing by? And the buyers I brought, and the cheers when he came out—Loman! Loman! Loman! God Almighty, he’ll be great yet. A star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away.”

At the end of Act I, Willy Loman explains to his wife, Linda, that he is hopeful again because their son Biff has shared his plan to ask for a loan to buy a ranch. Just hearing Biff’s plan is enough to transform Willy’s attitude from depression to almost manic optimism. He remembers Biff as a high school football hero, which was also a moment of triumph for Willy. Willy

transfers his own hopes and ambitions to his son, and he deceives himself that his son is too magnificent to fail.

“Oh, yeah, my father lived many years in Alaska. He was an adventurous man. We’ve got quite a little streak of self-reliance in our family.”

Willy Loman is trying to convince his boss Howard to give him a job in the New York office. Howard has already told Willy that there is no job, but Willy continues to make increasingly desperate requests. Willy has rewritten the truth of his father’s desertion of the family; now his father’s adventures have become part of Willy’s sales pitch. To give himself courage, Willy has deceived himself into believing he is an independent spirit, a self-reliant pioneer hero like his father, whereas in reality he is begging for his job.

> “I’m not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them! I’m one dollar an hour, Willy! I tried seven states and I couldn’t raise it. A buck an hour! Do you gather my meaning? I’m not bringing home any prizes any more, and you’re going to stop waiting for me to bring them home!”

Near the end of the play, Biff Loman confronts his father Willy. Biff attempts to express his own need to stop deceiving himself in his efforts to fulfill his father’s dreams. Biff is also blowing the whistle on the constant rationalizing Willy constructs about his lack of success. Biff’s coming to terms with his own

self-deception is the moment when he finds himself at last, by seeing himself as he really is. His emotional outburst leads to Willy's recognition that his son loves him, implying that it is only when self-deception ends that true caring is possible.

**(6)- Family:**

**[HAPPY:]** Funny, Biff, y'know? Us sleeping in here again? The old beds. He pats his bed affectionately. All the talk that went across these two beds, huh? Our whole lives. BIFF: Yeah. Lotta dreams and plans.

Happy and Biff chat while visiting their parents in the house where they grew up. Happy's words reveal a strong bond between the brothers and their good memories of their childhood years. The scene reminds the audience that Willy Loman has provided a home for his family and that his family has shared his dreams.

> 'Cause I get so lonely—especially when business is bad and there's nobody to talk to. I get the feeling that I'll never sell anything again, that I won't make a living for you, or a business, a business for the boys. He talks through The Woman's subsiding laughter; The Woman primps at the mirror. There's so much I want to make for—

Willy reflects on a conversation he had with his wife many years earlier. Even then, Linda's role was to rebuild Willy's ego after one of his disappointments. Willy's words assure Linda that his goal is to work hard to provide for her and their boys. At the same time, the stage directions in italics hint that Willy is

betraying his wife with The Woman. Willy believes in his role of being the family provider, and he uses his emotional rhetoric to cover his extramarital affair. His behavior will eventually tear his family apart.

> “Father was a very great and a very wild-hearted man. We would start in Boston, and he’d toss the whole family into the wagon, and then he’d drive the team right across the country; through Ohio, and Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and all the Western states. And we’d stop in the towns and sell the flutes that he’d made on the way. Great inventor, Father. With one gadget he made more in a week than a man like you could make in a lifetime.”

Willy’s older brother Ben appears in Willy’s mind’s eye, describing their father before he abandoned the family to go to Alaska. As recalled or imagined by Willy, Ben’s reminiscence depicts the idealized family life of an old-fashioned salesman. Ben’s claim about the money their father made is obviously an exaggeration or self-deception—by Ben, by Willy, or perhaps by both men.

> “There were a lot of nice days. When he’d come home from a trip, or on Sundays, making the stoop, finishing the cellar, putting on the new porch; when he built the extra bathroom; and put up the garage. You know something, Charley, there’s more of him in that front stoop than in all the sales he ever made.”

While standing at his father's gravesite, Biff talks to his father's friend. Biff's words reveal that in spite of all his differences with his father he has affectionate memories of their family life. Biff memorializes times when the whole family was together, and his father was working for them all. Biff's speech also honors the work that Willy Loman put into their family home. The image of Willy Loman working on his house represents the unsung heroism of Willy's struggle to build something lasting for his family.

**(7)- Money:**

"When did I lose my temper? I simply asked him if he was making any money. Is that a criticism?"

Willy Loman is responding to his wife Linda, who has admonished him for losing his temper and criticizing their son Biff. Willy's defensive response reveals that money is a very touchy subject. Throughout the play, money is the persistent reality check on the characters' self-deceptions and fantasies, and the need for money is the direct cause of many of the characters' actions. When Willy asked Biff about money, his unspoken question was whether he could hope for any monetary help from his son.

**[LINDA:]** buttoning up his jacket as he unbuttons it: All told, about two hundred dollars would carry us, dear. But that includes the last payment on the mortgage. After this payment, Willy, the house belongs to us. WILLY: It's twenty-five years!

Linda Loman is talking to her husband Willy as she helps him get dressed for his interview with his boss. Linda's comments show that she is in charge of the family's finances. As always, Linda tries to cheer Willy along, this time by reminding him that they will soon own their home free and clear. The dialogue reminds the audience of the hard work and determination that Willy has put into fulfilling his dream, a goal he has accomplished only by meeting incessant demands for money.

> "A man can't go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something. You can't, you can't—Ben moves toward him as though to interrupt. You gotta consider now. Don't answer so quick. Remember, it's a guaranteed twenty-thousand-dollar proposition. Now look, Ben, I want you to go through the ins and outs of this thing with me. I've got nobody to talk to, Ben, and the woman has suffered, you hear me?"

Willy Loman is becoming increasingly distraught and suicidal as the play nears its end. In this scene, Willy holds an imaginary conversation with Ben, his long-departed older brother. Willy is contemplating committing suicide so that his wife can get the insurance money. To Willy, money is the most important measure of his own value. The temptation of the large death benefit leads him to deceive himself that Linda will be better off when he is dead. Money drives the final decision of Willy's life.

## *Character List*

**Willy Loman:**

An insecure, self-deluded traveling salesman. Willy believes wholeheartedly in the American Dream of easy success and wealth, but he never achieves it. Nor do his sons fulfill his hope that they will succeed where he has failed. When Willy's illusions begin to fail under the pressing realities of his life, his mental health begins to unravel. The overwhelming tensions caused by this disparity, as well as those caused by the societal imperatives that drive Willy, form the essential conflict of Death of a Salesman.

Despite his desperate searching through his past, Willy does not achieve the self-realization or self-knowledge typical of the tragic hero. The quasi-resolution that his suicide offers him represents only a partial discovery of the truth. While he achieves a professional understanding of himself and the fundamental nature of the sales profession, Willy fails to realize his personal failure and betrayal of his soul and family through the meticulously constructed artifice of his life. He cannot grasp the true personal, emotional, spiritual understanding of himself as a literal "loman" or "low man." Willy is too driven by his own "willy"-ness or perverse "willfulness" to recognize the slanted reality that his desperate mind has forged. Still, many critics, focusing on Willy's entrenchment in a quagmire of lies, delusions, and self-deceptions, ignore the significant accomplishment of his partial self-realization. Willy's failure to recognize the anguished love offered to him by his family is crucial to the climax of his torturous day, and the play presents this incapacity as the real tragedy. Despite this failure, Willy makes the most extreme sacrifice in his attempt to leave an inheritance that will allow Biff to fulfill the American Dream.

Ben's final mantra—"The jungle is dark, but full of diamonds"—turns Willy's suicide into a metaphorical moral struggle, a final skewed ambition to realize his full commercial and material capacity. His final act, according to Ben, is "not like an appointment at all" but like a "diamond . . . rough and hard to the touch." In the absence of any real degree of self-knowledge or truth, Willy is able to achieve a tangible result. In some respect, Willy does experience a sort of revelation, as he finally comes to understand that the product he sells is himself. Through the imaginary advice of Ben, Willy ends up fully believing his earlier assertion to Charley that "after all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive."

**Biff Loman:**

Willy's thirty-four-year-old elder son. Biff led a charmed life in high school as a football star with scholarship prospects, good male friends, and fawning female admirers. He failed math, however, and did not have enough credits to graduate. Since then, his kleptomania has gotten him fired from every job that he has held. Biff represents Willy's vulnerable, poetic, tragic side. He cannot ignore his instincts, which tell him to abandon Willy's paralyzing dreams and move out West to work with his hands. He ultimately fails to reconcile his life with Willy's expectations of him.

Unlike Willy and Happy, Biff feels compelled to seek the truth about himself. While his father and brother are unable to accept the miserable reality of their respective lives, Biff acknowledges his failure and eventually manages to confront it.

Even the difference between his name and theirs reflects this polarity: whereas Willy and Happy willfully and happily delude themselves, Biff bristles stiffly at self-deception. Biff's discovery that Willy has a mistress strips him of his faith in Willy and Willy's ambitions for him. Consequently, Willy sees Biff as an underachiever, while Biff sees himself as trapped in Willy's grandiose fantasies. After his epiphany in Bill Oliver's office, Biff determines to break through the lies surrounding the Loman family in order to come to realistic terms with his own life. Intent on revealing the simple and humble truth behind Willy's fantasy, Biff longs for the territory (the symbolically free West) obscured by his father's blind faith in a skewed, materialist version of the American Dream. Biff's identity crisis is a function of his and his father's disillusionment, which, in order to reclaim his identity, he must expose.

**Happy Loman:**

Willy's thirty-two-year-old younger son. Happy has lived in Biff's shadow all of his life, but he compensates by nurturing his relentless sex drive and professional ambition. Happy represents Willy's sense of self-importance, ambition, and blind servitude to societal expectations. Although he works as an assistant to an assistant buyer in a department store, Happy presents himself as supremely important. Additionally, he practices bad business ethics and sleeps with the girlfriends of his superiors.

Happy shares none of the poetry that erupts from Biff and that is buried in Willy—he is the stunted incarnation of Willy's worst traits and the embodiment of the lie of the happy American

Dream. As such, Happy is a difficult character with whom to empathize. He is one-dimensional and static throughout the play. His empty vow to avenge Willy's death by finally "beat[ing] this racket" provides evidence of his critical condition: for Happy, who has lived in the shadow of the inflated expectations of his brother, there is no escape from the Dream's indoctrinated lies. Happy's diseased condition is irreparable—he lacks even the tiniest spark of self-knowledge or capacity for self-analysis. He does share Willy's capacity for self-delusion, trumpeting himself as the assistant buyer at his store, when, in reality, he is only an assistant to the assistant buyer. He does not possess a hint of the latent thirst for knowledge that proves Biff's salvation. Happy is a doomed, utterly duped figure, destined to be swallowed up by the force of blind ambition that fuels his insatiable sex drive.

**Linda Loman:**

Willy's loyal, loving wife. Linda suffers through Willy's grandiose dreams and self-delusions. Occasionally, she seems to be taken in by Willy's self-deluded hopes for future glory and success, but at other times, she seems far more realistic and less fragile than her husband. She has nurtured the family through all of Willy's misguided attempts at success, and her emotional strength and perseverance support Willy until his collapse.

Linda and Charley serve as forces of reason throughout the play. Linda is probably the most enigmatic and complex character in *Death of a Salesman*, or even in all of Miller's work. Linda views freedom as an escape from debt, the reward of total ownership of the material goods that symbolize success and

stability. Willy's prolonged obsession with the American Dream seems, over the long years of his marriage, to have left Linda internally conflicted. Nevertheless, Linda, by far the toughest, most realistic, and most levelheaded character in the play, appears to have kept her emotional life intact. As such, she represents the emotional core of the drama.

If Linda is a sort of emotional prophet, overcome by the inevitable end that she foresees with startling clarity, then Charley functions as a sort of poetic prophet or sage. Miller portrays Charley as ambiguously gendered or effeminate, much like Tiresias, the mythological seer in Sophocles' *Oedipus* plays. Whereas Linda's lucid diagnosis of Willy's rapid decline is made possible by her emotional sanity, Charley's prognosis of the situation is logical, grounded firmly in practical reasoned analysis. He recognizes Willy's financial failure, and the job offer that he extends to Willy constitutes a commonsense solution. Though he is not terribly fond of Willy, Charley understands his plight and shields him from blame.

**Charley:**

Willy's next-door neighbor. Charley owns a successful business and his son, Bernard, is a wealthy, important lawyer. Willy is jealous of Charley's success. Charley gives Willy money to pay his bills, and Willy reveals at one point, choking back tears, that Charley is his only friend.

**Bernard:**

Bernard is Charley's son and an important, successful lawyer. Although Willy used to mock Bernard for studying hard, Bernard always loved Willy's sons dearly and regarded Biff as a hero. Bernard's success is difficult for Willy to accept because his own sons' lives do not measure up.

**Ben:**

Willy's wealthy older brother. Ben has recently died and appears only in Willy's "daydreams." Willy regards Ben as a symbol of the success that he so desperately craves for himself and his sons.

Willy's dead older brother Ben represents the wealth and success that eludes Willy. In his life, Ben fell into wealth quickly, having discovered diamonds in the jungles of Africa on one of his expeditions at the age of twenty-one. He never had to toil in white collar work the way Willy, his father, and Happy do, which lends support to one of the most significant facets of the American Dream: that wealth and success is anyone's for the taking, if they have the gumption to take it. Though Ben rarely visited and regarded Willy with scorn when he did, Willy craved his brother's acceptance and continues to apotheosize his achievements as the paragon of success. However, Ben's fortune was made by exploiting and profiting off a land to which he had no claim, which only serves to exemplify the romanticized concept Willy has of an intrepid explorer getting lucky enough to strike gold in a far-off land.

Because Ben is dead throughout the play, his appearances and dialogue are filtered through the deluded

nature of Willy's fraying consciousness. Willy views Ben as a self-made man, someone who truly pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, despite the fact that Ben's prosperity was the result of luck and not a lifetime of hard work. To Willy, Ben represents a world that is only ever expanding, where exploration leads to conquest—his adventures offer a stark contrast to the cramped, metropolitan world in which Willy spends his days. By the play's end, Willy's imagined conversations with Ben propel him to a tragic end. That "[t]he jungle is dark, but full of diamonds" suggests Willy, like Ben, must do what needs to be done—just as Ben ventured into the dark and returned with diamonds, so too must Willy venture into the darkness to ensure Biff receives the insurance money. Ben's existence enables Willy to view himself as the ultimate product, implying he is both the salesman and the final sale. In this way, Ben cements his role in the play as being symbolic of the very wealth and success that eventually leads Willy to his doom.

**The Woman:**

Willy's mistress when Happy and Biff were in high school. The Woman's attention and admiration boost Willy's fragile ego. When Biff catches Willy in his hotel room with The Woman, he loses faith in his father, and his dream of passing math and going to college dies.

**Howard Wagner:**

Willy's boss. Howard inherited the company from his father, whom Willy regarded as "a masterful man" and "a prince." Though much younger than Willy, Howard treats Willy with

condescension and eventually fires him, despite Willy's wounded assertions that he named Howard at his birth.

**Stanley:**

A waiter at Frank's Chop House. Stanley and Happy seem to be friends, or at least acquaintances, and they banter about and ogle Miss Forsythe together before Biff and Willy arrive at the restaurant.

**Miss Forsythe and Letta:**

Two young women whom Happy and Biff meet at Frank's Chop House. It seems likely that Miss Forsythe and Letta are prostitutes, judging from Happy's repeated comments about their moral character and the fact that they are "on call."

**Jenny:**
Charley's secretary.

## General Commentary Notes

Int.J.Eng.Lang.Lit&Trans.StudiesVol.2.Issue. 4.2015 (Oct-Dec) 369 GURPREET KAUR ABSTRACT Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman (1949), created its own genre: the American tragedy. In Death of a Salesman Miller demonstrated his perfect answer to critics of his earlier dramas who claimed he was incapable of producing other than a conventional play. Brooks Atkinson, calls it a generally accepted tragic masterpiece. Arthur Miller's American dreamer Willy Lowman is an illustration of much practiced philosophy of being well liked and exemplifies America's success myth. The tells the story of a man confronting failure in the success-driven society of America and shows the tragic path, which eventually leads to Willy Loman's suicide. The play has been welcomed as a great technical triumph, regardless of what one may think of this play as a tragedy of Willy Loman. In this paper, I intend, to frame Miller's dramatic output within the American dramatic tradition. Dramatic techniques are used in multiple ways by Miller to convey different angles of the story while lighting patterns follow the dialogue or music to exhibit the play's mood. The dramatic structure's various aspects such as events, time and plot have also been described. The play has been structured "expressionistically", in that, Miller broke down conventional constraints of time and place and moved the audience in and out of Willy's past and then into the present and then back in the past again, as Willy shuttles between the dreams and promises of his past and the harsh reality of the present. Keywords : Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman, American Dream, Expressionism. ©KY PUBLICATIONS Arthur Miller's extensive

use of dramatic elements in his plays, such as sound, particular attention to stage settings, and his dialogues gives a rare effectiveness. Critics have noted the impact of his relatively simple use of language for his dialogues, with no grandiose wordplay the beauty and effectiveness of dialogue lies in its simplicity. The dialogue in the play gives the impression of realism. Linda is the character who most often expresses the universal aspects of the Loman predicament : LINDA: “One day you’ll knock on this door and there’ll be strange people here...” (Act 1,pg38) The simplicity of sentence construction and vocabulary is the ‘feature of her most memorable speech’ LINDA: “Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person.” (Act 1,pg39) Vol. 2. Issue 4.,2015 (Oct. -Dec. ) ARTHUR MILLER’S DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE IN DEATH OF A SALESMAN GURPREET KAUR Research Scholar Magadh University INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND TRANSLATION STUDIES (IJELR) A QUARTERLY, INDEXED, REFEREED AND PEER REVIEWED OPEN ACCESS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL http://www.ijelr.in KY PUBLICATIONS RESEARCH ARTICLE GURPREET KAUR

Int.J.Eng.Lang.Lit&Trans.StudiesVol.2.Issue. 4.2015 (Oct-Dec) 370 GURPREET KAUR The position by the word ‘attention’, in Linda’s sentence gives it more emphasis, as does its repetition. The whole speech transcends the common place; this is not ordinary, everyday language.” Arthur Miller’s play is an example of non-linear storytelling. Set in Brooklyn during the late 1940s, Death of a Salesman follows the last day of the old, unsuccessful salesman Willy Loman’s life and his struggle to

achieve success. It is a play about the last day of a salesman and about the interactions of love and hatred, of reality and fantasy, of sense of guilt and quarrel that evitably drive him to commit suicide. The play moves between the past and present, between the real space of the Loman's home and the place of Willy Loman's mind. The play opens with Willy returning from a failed business trip late at night who is mentally perplexed. He has reached the point of exhaustion where he not only is unable to continue his work : "WILLY: I'm tired to the death. I couldn't make it. I just couldn't make it, Linda. LINDA : Where were you all day? You look terrible. WILLY: I got as far as a little above Yonkers. I stopped for a cup of coffee. Maybe it was the coffee. LINDA: What? WILLY : I suddenly couldn't drive any more. The car kept going off onto the shoulder, y'know? LINDA : Oh. Maybe it was the steering again. I don't think Angelo knows the Studebaker. WILLY: No, it's me, it's me. Suddenly I realize I'm goin' sixty miles an hour and I don't remember the last five minutes. I'm — I can't seem to — keep my mind to it."(Act 1, pg 5) Willy and his wife, Linda, talk about the visit of his oldest son Biff who has been working as a farm worker in the West. Biff and his younger brother Happy, who is also visiting, overhear their father talking to himself in the kitchen. Linda tells her two sons about Willy´s deteriorating mental health and suicide attempts. Biff decides to help his father. Biff and Happy come up with a business plan and ask Biff´s former employer for a loan to make it a reality. Inspired, Willy decides at the same time to ask his boss for local job. He receives his severest blows when he needs the greatest amount of love and care. He is unable to travel extensively. He makes a request to his young employer to relieve him of such a tiring burden and give him a comfortable

job. But, for the capitalism businessman no moral or legal obligation can be biding. To him, Willy is commercially as useless as the peels of a fruit. So, HOWARD (he says):“I can’t take blood from a stone.”(Act 2, pg 58) Willy´s request was rejected and he was fired and Biff´s former employer did not even recognize him. Willy asks his neighbour Charley to loan him money. Charley offers him a job instead but Willy rejects the offer. “CHARLEY: You want a job? WILLY: I got a job, I told you that What the hell are you offering me a job for? CHARLEY: Don’t get insulted. WILLY: Don’t insult me.” (Act 1, pg 28) The climax comes when Biff reveals the truth about himself as a failure to his father. He begs him to give up his dream of him. “WILLY: What’re you doing? What’re you doing? (To Linda.) Why is he crying? BIFF (crying, broken): Will you let me go, for Christ’s sake? Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens? I’ll go in the morning. Put him — put him to bed.”(Act 2, pg 99) In anguish, Willy decides to commit suicide so that Biff can collect his life insurance money. The whole situation sums up in Biff’s remark who says on his father’s death. BIFF: “He had the wrong dream. All, all wrong.”(Requiem, pg 103) The tragedy of Willy Loman, says Arthur Miller, is: “Willy gave his life, or sold it, in order to justify the waste of it…” Willy represents every low-man in America. It is a tragedy of a man troubled by the society. Willy believes in American myth that “Success is obtained by being well-liked”. His dream ends up in nightmare. So the play challenges to new American capitalistic concepts. Int.J.Eng.Lang.Lit&Trans.StudiesVol.2.Issue. 4.2015 (Oct-Dec) 371 GURPREET KAUR Arthur Miller uses several techniques to characterize Willy, Biff, and Happy’s American capitalistic ideology. His techniques serve to explain the reasons

behind his characters actions. Each of these characters taken a wrong turn down the road of life and are now trying to rectify the damage they have inflicted upon themselves and others in their life. Willy's goal throughout life was to climb out of his social class. As a salesman, Willy was a failure and he tried desperately to make his sons never end up like him. As a result, he loses his mind and his grasp on reality. Death of a Salesman is a story of a man who has lost his mind and sacrifices himself to an idea, the false promise of a golden future. Willy Loman has absorbed the values of his society until they seem part of what he wishes to see as his own definition. His is a salesman; the epitome of a society built on social performance and wedded to the idea of a transforming future. Future for Willy is rosy and full of hope. Bigsby in Critical Study (2005), declares: “Willy Loman is a man who wishes his reality to come into line with his hopes, a man desperate to leave his mark on the world through his own endeavors and through those of his children. Though he seems to seek death, what he fears above all is that he will go before he has justified himself in his own eyes and there are few, from New York to Beijing, who do not understand the urgency of that need”. (Bigsby, Critical Study, pg 101) Thus, Death of a Salesman is Miller’s proclamation of the end of Enlightenment and Grand narratives. The entire play may be an account of Loman’s struggle to attain success, to be one with the American society. He drags the entire family into the quagmire of his decisions, and attempts to influence their lives to attain satisfaction, as he seems resigned to his fate. Willy`s sense of needing love and respect causes him to dedicate his life to the eternal American quest of a transformed tomorrow. Loman’s death, his erasure, is probably one of the masterstrokes of such

a protagonist- with his death comes insurance, his support to his family, and to achieve a plethora of other goals. To quote Jacobson- “Leonard Moss has noted that he chooses death "not simply as an escape from shame but as a last attempt to re-establish his own self- confidence and his family's integrity." (Leonard Moss, Arthur Miller (New Haven, l967), p. 45.) Willy’s idea of death to get the insurance money makes it seem possible to synthesize the values of Ben and Singleman. For by entering the dark, unknown "jungle" of death Loman might bring out tangible wealth, "like diamonds," thus becoming as much an adventurer as Ben but within the skyscraper world of New York. Throughout the story, Willy often has flashbacks of the conversations that he and his brother Ben once had and the author intertwines them in past and present very nicely. “BEN: Is mother living with you? WILLY: No, she died a long time ago. BEN: That’s too bad. Fine specimen of a lady, Mother.” (Act 1, pg 31) These flashbacks illustrate Willy's loss of reality from the world. As Willy and Charley are playing a game of cards, Willy has a flashback of him and Ben and Charley becomes completely confused, believing that Willy is speaking to him. “BEN: I’d hoped to see the old girl. CHARLEY: Who died? BEN: Heard anything from Father, have you? WILLY : What do you mean, who died? CHARLEY : What’re you talkin’ about?” (Act 1, pg 31) As a character, Ben represents the opportunity that Willy did not take and all the fortune that he missed. Ben is the only important character not physically present during Willy's last day. He is on stage only as he exists in Willy's mind. Although Ben is dead before the play begins, the force which he symbolizes draws Willy to suicide. Ben also stands out as the play's only predominantly formalized characterization. That in him Miller

combines realism with expressionism in a ratio inverse to that of the rest of the play seems another indication of his distinctive symbolic function. The expressionistic stage setting, use of light, sound and introducing Willy's imaginary talk with Ben all contribute to the Playwright's attempt to highlight Americanism.

Int.J.Eng.Lang.Lit&Trans.StudiesVol.2.Issue. 4.2015 (Oct-Dec) 372 GURPREET KAUR Willy's false notion of ideals from the beginning by Miller's use of symbols and various expressions used in the play. The American west, Alaska, African jungle are uttered several times to illustrate the play's recurrent theme of American dream. Stocking scene is used to indicate Willy's alienation and infidelity. His two heavy suitcases symbolize the burden of two sons. These baggages illustrate pluck and luck theory. Willy planting seeds in the shadow which will not grow anything as there is no sunlight. It focuses the fact that without proper steps you will not able to get the fruit. Willy cannot breathe in his house which is suffocating by being surrounded by large apartment buildings. Linda cannot grow carrots here. His walls are transparent denoting the idea of glasses and thereby fragile, like Willy's trivial city life. When Willy is considering killing himself, he hears Ben telling him that, BEN : "the jungle is dark but full of diamonds." (Act 2, pg 91) The jungle here is a risk (physically and, more interestingly, morally), which has the potential to yield wealth. In deciding to commit suicide, Willy perceives himself going into the dark jungle to get diamonds for his son. Arthur Miller employs Expressionism to create a subjective truth and his plays appeared so real as if noone wrote them but they just happened. He combined expressionism with realism to create this form, he made an

innovation in dramatic techniques. In his own belief, Salesman "broke the bonds of a long tradition of realism." One of the most notable contradictions between Willy's idealized version of life and reality is displayed during a conversation between Willy and his wife Linda. WILLY : "Oh I'll knock 'em dead next week. I'll go to Hartford. I'm very well liked in Hartford. You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me." (Act 1, pg 23) This specific conflict between Willy's idealized life and reality, or between what kind of man he could have been and what he actually is, has rendered him unstable in this late stage of life, both mentally and emotionally. The realistic technique is also seen in the progress of much of the action – the dialogue between Willy and Linda when Willy -unexpectedly comes back from his business trip "LINDA: Willy! WILLY: It's all right. I came back. LINDA: Why? What happened? Did something happen, Willy? WILLY: No, nothing happened." (Act 1, pg 5). The dialogues between Happy and Biff, Willy's whole interview with Howard, Willy's driving away to kill himself, the scene at Willy's grave, and so on. Miller makes use of many other technical devices of music and light to attain the standard target of an expressionistic play. To reveal the true nature of Willy Loman Arthur Miller makes use of Music. The music is symbolic of Willy Loman's nostalgia for the lost paradise of rusticity of the New England. The dramatic devices, such as music and lighting effects, are used by Miller to supplement the expressionistic lapses into the past. Each Act, as well as the final Requiem, is introduced with music. At the beginning of Act II, the music heard in the early morning "is gay and bright" as the stage direction informs. The music and light reminds the audience of the temporary reconciliation which has taken place in the Loman

family and also diminishes the grim hint of Willy's suicide towards the end of the first Act. The play opens with a melody played on the flute. The music is a device for dissolving time and distance. The music suggests, in Miller's words, "grass and trees and the horizon". It is associated with the flutes which Willy's father made and sold across the whole country. The flute here is an expressionistic device to symbolize life in the open, a life full of hope and peace against a pastoral background. This music is heard as soon as Willy and Ben being to speak of the father. This technique also heightens the basic irony of the play by showing in related episodes of Willy's life the conflict between what Miller calls "the previously assumed and believed-in results of ordinary and accepted actions" and "their abrupt and unforeseen--but apparently logical-- effects." Except the technique of expressionism and realism, there are other significant techniques at work in the play. Miller has deliberately blurred the past and the present of Willy Loman. By blurring the boundary of the past and the present, Miller has tried to throw dramatic spotlight upon the suicidal predicament of Willy Loman: Int.J.Eng.Lang.Lit&Trans.StudiesVol.2.Issue. 4.2015 (Oct-Dec) 373 GURPREET KAUR "WILLY : Where is Dad? Didn't you follow him? How did you get started? BEN: Well, I don't know how much you remember. WILLY: I remember you walking away down some open road. BEN : I was going to find Father in Alaska. WILLY: Where is he? BEN: At that age I had a very faulty view of geography, William. I discovered after a few days that I was heading due south, so instead of Alaska, I ended up in Africa." (Act 1, pg 33) Willy's abandonment by his father and brother at a young age leaves him with many unanswered questions and concerns. This secret fear corrodes his character,

making him kind of a desperate person. Ironically, this desperation eventually leads to both Biff abandoning him and Willy abandoning his family through suicide. To demonstrate the psychic nature of a frustrated and suicidal man Arthur Miller has not divided Act into scenes. Moreover, Miller has divided the play into two Acts only. The unity of time and action contributed to the credibility and appropriateness of an expressionist reality. Miller himself admits that its treatment of time “explodes the watch and the calendar”. By not dividing acts into scenes the playwright succeeded in capturing the smooth continuity of uninterrupted action demanding perfect coherence. Miller is subversive of the chronological unfolding of the plot. It has, on the contrary, lays emphasis upon the circular unfolding of the plot. In the expansion of plot of Death of a Salesman both the past and the present coincide rendering entire experiences confused and chaotic. Centola writes, “He convinces himself that only his death can restore his prominence in his family’s eyes and retrieve for him his lost sense of honor.” (A Sartrean Reading of Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman. (1988) p. 297-302) Willy fails to see that his illusion of success was a lie, even when Biff confronts him with the truth. When Willy felt that he had gained back a part of Biff that was lost, he wanted Biff to hold on to that and remember him under those terms. Willy felt that the only way that that could be accomplished was to take his life on his terms, gaining control, respect and the love that he felt he always deserved. By portraying Willy’s struggle to accept the falsehood of the American dream and his failure to realize that Biff does not wish to pursue this dream, Miller does not only emphasize the flaws of material wealth, but also that each person measures success differently. While Willy interpreted

success as being wealthy and well respected, “WILLY: Bernard is not well liked, is he? BIFF: He’s liked, but he’s not well liked, (referring to Bernard).”(Act 1, pg 21) Willy's recipe for success is based entirely around a cult of personality. Most people are liked by their friends and acquaintances. But only great men, according to Willy, are truly well-liked - and that is what brings them success. In this quote, we see that Willy's belief in personal connections has been transferred to his sons as well, as they dismiss their friend Bernard for only garden-variety likability. Thus, Death of a Salesman is a multilevel achievement which demonstrates the remarkable fusion of various dramatic techniques used by Miller and this assimilation helps Miller communicate with his readers and audiences quite effectively. Its a realistic evaluation of American values. To conclude, Miller can create effect out of commonplace constructions, and appeal to his audience like an artist. Miller is a dramatist who owes a debt to or has been influenced by Ibsen, Chekhov, and Dostoyevski and the German expressionism. He has broadened the horizons of realism. He wished to enrich the realistic style with an “evaluation of life” a constant articulation of ethical judgment on the other hand he also used the expressionistic style to capture the mental and emotional, not physical state of the character. Death of a Salesman represents the compromise mainly between realistic and expressionistic modes. Therefore, to Raymond Williams, “Death of a Salesman is an expressionistic reconstruction of naturalist substance, and the result is no hybrid but a particular form”. (Williams, Raymond. Modern Tragedy. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966.) This particular form of the play shows Arthur Miller’s deep insight into the tragedy of Willy Lowman who is totally shattered by false values

which are also a part of his American Society. This shows Miller’s deep Int.J.Eng.Lang.Lit&Trans.StudiesVol.2.Issue. 4.2015 (Oct-Dec) 374 GURPREET KAUR understanding of stagecraft and dramatic technique. His use of time sequence, dialogues, music and light greatly add significance to his dramatic technique through which he combines social awareness with a genuine concern for the psychology of common American. Death of a Salesman is therefore more than a moving portrait of one man's self-delusion and exhaustion. It is a complex presentation of American aspirations and universally felt dilemmas of existence.

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